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Beyond the Valley
Of the Turtles

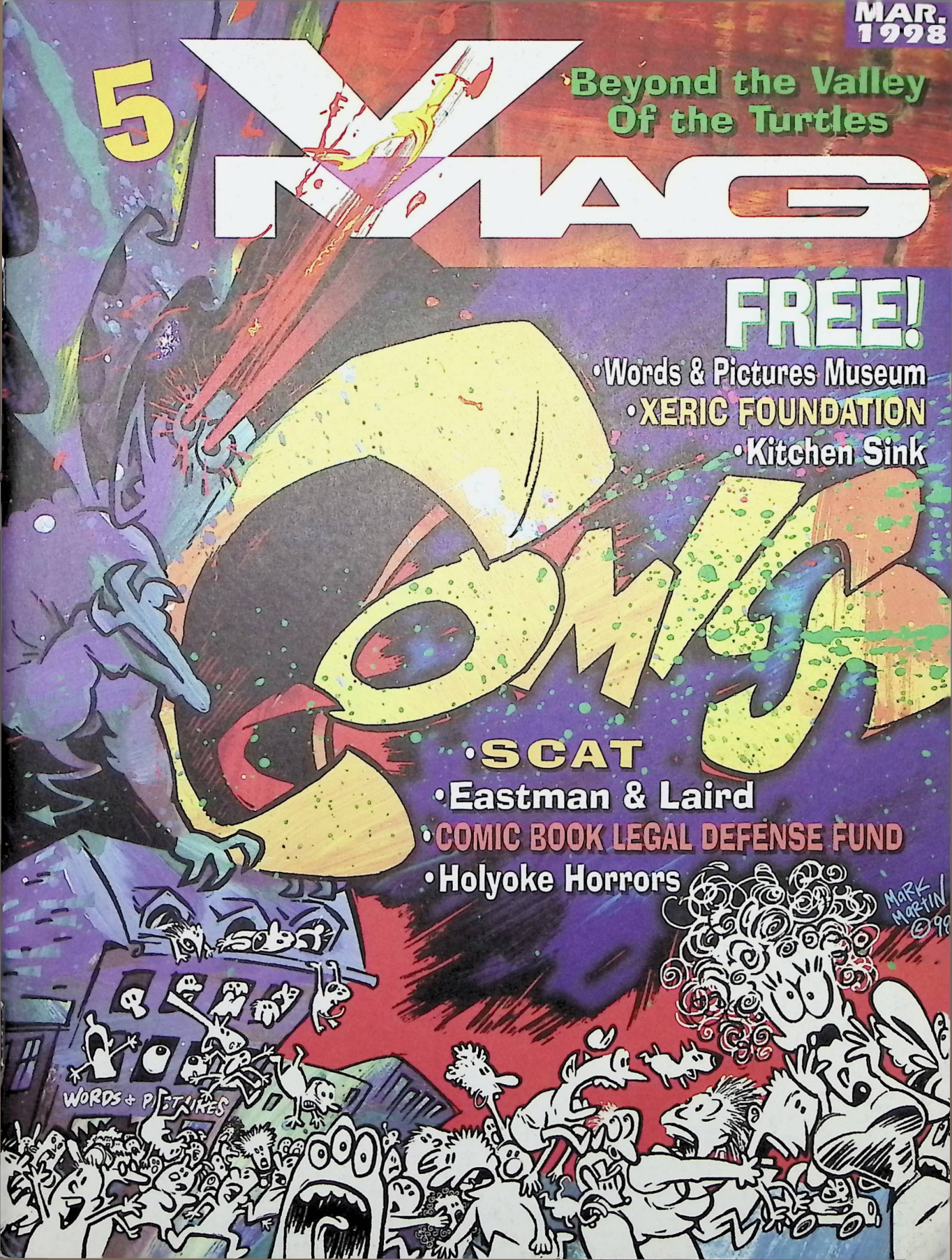
FREE!

- Words & Pictures Museum
- XERIC FOUNDATION
- Kitchen Sink

• SCAT

- Eastman & Laird
- COMIC BOOK LEGAL DEFENSE FUND
- Holyoke Horrors

MARK
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#16
On Sale
April 1998

GOT
MILK?

Image

V MAG

スパイダーマン①



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issue 5 / march 1998

THE VALLEY'S COMICS INDUSTRY

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Cover painting by the marvelous Mark Martin.

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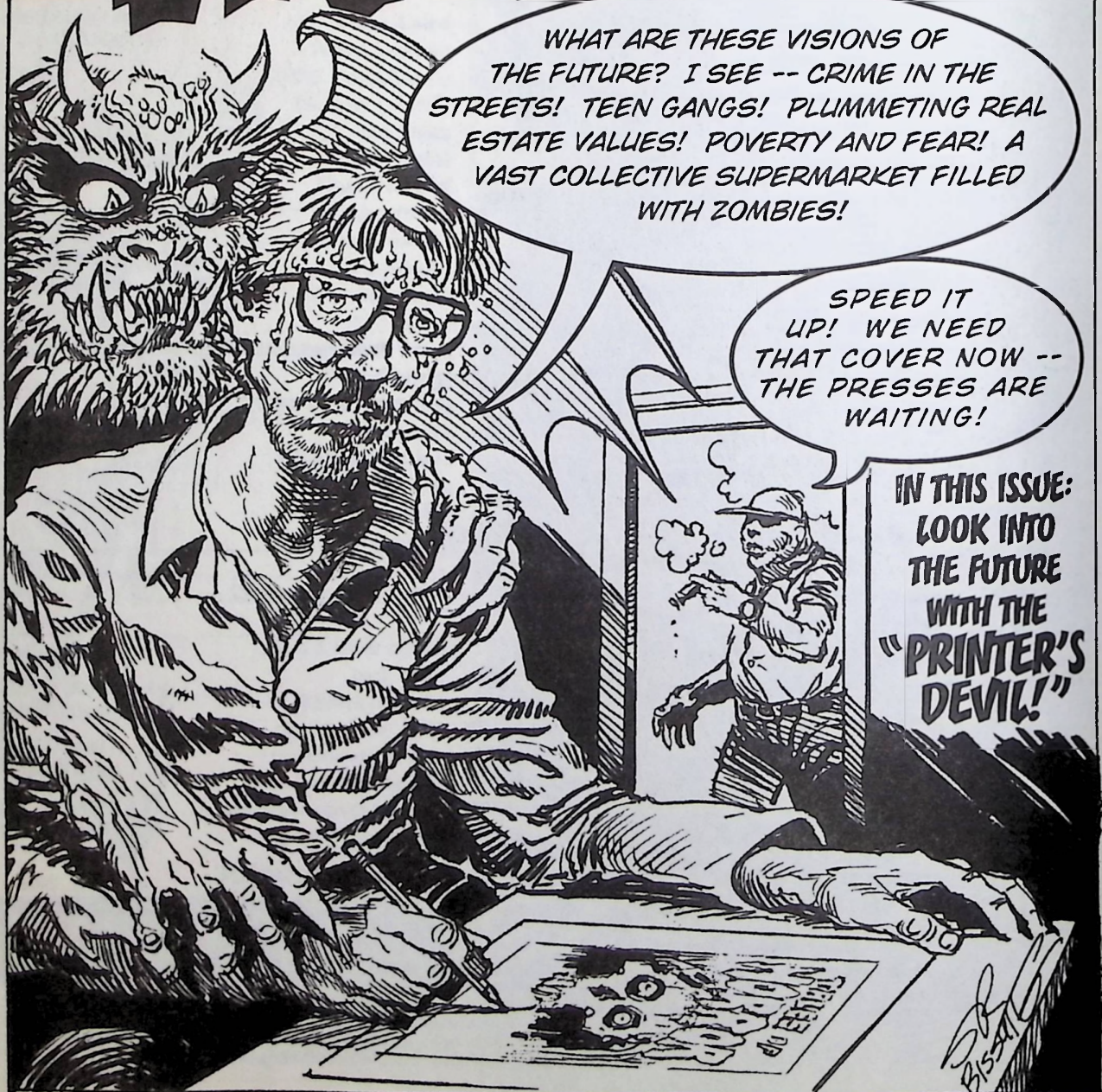
Holyoke HORROR

WHAT ARE THESE VISIONS OF
THE FUTURE? I SEE -- CRIME IN THE
STREETS! TEEN GANGS! PLUMMETING REAL
ESTATE VALUES! POVERTY AND FEAR! A
VAST COLLECTIVE SUPERMARKET FILLED
WITH ZOMBIES!

SPEED IT
UP! WE NEED
THAT COVER NOW --
THE PRESSES ARE
WAITING!

IN THIS ISSUE:
LOOK INTO
THE FUTURE
WITH THE
"PRINTER'S
DEVIL!"

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HOLYOKE HORRORS!

Pre-Code Horror from the Pioneer Valley

by Stephen R. Bissette

"Listen to me!! Out there in Grandfather's barn, IT'S WAITING!! A hideous monster more horrible than anything out of an idiot's nightmare! I know! I've SEEN it!!"

- from "Dinosaur in Grandfather's Barn,"
Fantastic #8, Feb. 1951

What lurks in YOUR Grandfather's barn or Grandmother's attic?

If you live in or around Holyoke, they might harbor a long-forgotten stash of glorious old comics, remnants of Holyoke's heyday as "Paper City." Hideous monsters may indeed lurk in their pages, along with heroes, heathens, and heart-breakers. Though EC Comics (based in New York City) will forever hold the crown as "King" of the pre-Comics Code horror comics publishers for the enduring impact of *Tales From the Crypt* and its brethren, Holyoke printers ran the presses on countless gruesome comics during the notorious 1950-54 horror and crime comics explosion — and even published a few themselves. Stories like "Spider Hider," "Don't Dance With Me When I'm Dead," "My Daddy Should Have Listened," and (my personal favorite) "Dinosaur in Grandfather's Barn" graced the pages of the Holyoke horror comics, carving their own peculiar niche in comics history.

Decades before Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird relocated their *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* self-publishing venture to Northampton to build the Mirage empire, Holyoke was an equally volatile comic book heaven and hell. Books, paperbacks, magazines, newspapers and comic books rolled off regional printing presses in unimaginable quantities, gainfully employing residents and fueling the rise and fall of local print and paper businesses.

Comic books were among the most colorful products to roll off the Holyoke presses. Most of these comics were packaged and published by New York firms, printing and shipping their titles in

Holyoke as schedules permitted. For instance, before Marvel Comics became the Marvel Comics dynasty we know today, they published a wide variety of titles under multiple company mastheads: Timely, Atlas, Marvel, Hercules Publishing, Comic Combine Corp., Current Detective Stories, Classic Syndicate, etc. Under this plethora of company names, Marvel

titles like *Adventures Into Terror*, *Amazing Detective*, *Journey Into Mystery*, *Marvel Tales*, and *Uncanny Tales* were printed in Holyoke during the early 1950's with crazy-quilt irregularity. One or two issues would be printed in Holyoke, the next would ship from Syracuse, New York, the next from Meriden or Bridgeport, Connecticut, while another title from the same company would ship that same month from Medina or Canton, Ohio. The printers didn't own the comic titles themselves, they simply printed them to order, whenever and wherever the publishers (who *did* own the comics, lock, stock, and barrel) engaged their services.

The size of these print runs seems mind-boggling in hindsight, especially in today's imploding comics market where print runs of 10,000 copies or more are considered viable. Between 1945 and 1950, when ten-cent comic books were still highly profitable items, most titles enjoyed print runs of 300,000 to 500,000 copies, with the most popular titles reportedly demanding print runs up to a million copies or more. Paying their writers, artists, editors and staff meager page rates and salaries while owning the creative properties without question, a successful comic book publisher could realize vast profits. However ghettoized the artform was, comics themselves were big business.

Working with such clients, Holyoke printers were necessarily aware of the potential profits to be made publishing (as well as printing) comic books. Over time, local entrepreneurs pursued a more interactive role in the industry. Alas, few succeeded, ultimately letting the New York and Connecticut publishers deal with the profits and pitfalls of packaging and publishing the comics themselves. After all, publishers would always need printers, and a client was preferable to a competitor in the volatile boom-and-bust comic book industry.

YEAH-- HE'S THE
BEST HORROR
ARTIST IN THE
WHOLE WIDE
WORLD ...

NAW-- HE'S
NO GOOD...
CAN'T EVEN
DRAW A
REAL
MONSTER ...



FEATURE



Nevertheless, comics' history is peppered with short-lived publishing ventures that originated in the area. The Holyoke Publishing Company was the first and most successful of these publishers, working in conjunction with other publishers and/or packagers on a number of superhero titles. These included *Captain Fearless* (1941, co-starring Miss Victory), *Captain Aero Comics* (1941-46, with Flag-Man and the continuing adventures of Miss Victory), and the long-running su-

perhero *Catman Comics* (1941-46),

which also featured Volton, one of the first superheroes drawn by a fifteen-year old named Joe Kubert. Catman had made his debut in Holyoke Publishing's anthology title *Crash Comics* (1940), the first of many anthologies. Later Holyoke entries included four fat issues of *Power Comics* (1944-45, graced with splashy color covers by golden age artist L.B. Cole), *Contact Comics* (1944-46, featuring Black Venus), *Terrific Comics* (1944, starring the Boomerang), and the one-shot *Veri Best Sure Fire Comics* (also printed as *Veri Best Sure Shot Comics*, 1945). Holyoke's most successful potpourri title was *Sparkling Stars* ("Variety Features: Detective, Animation, Sports, True") which spilled into the post-War era with thirty-three issues (1944-48). Try as they might, Holyoke Publishing's heroes never became household names. They remain unknown to all but a handful of Golden Age comic book fans.

In 1950, another comic book publisher set up shop in Holyoke as Youthful Magazines, Inc., at 1 Appleton Street, with the comics themselves packaged at their New York City editorial and executive offices at 105 East 35th Street. A 1952 statement of ownership lists Adrian B. Lopez as owner and George Ungar as editor and business manager, both based in New York, while Holyoke is named as office of publication. For three years, Youthful Magazines mounted their own modest line of comics in a number of genres.

Westerns were popular, so Youthful climbed aboard the wagon train with *Super Western* (four issues, Aug. 1950-March 1951), *Buffalo Bill* (eight issues?, 1950-51), *Indian Fighter* (eight issues, May 1950-Jan. 1952), and twelve issues of *Redskin* (Sept. 1950-Oct. 1952), offering "Thrilling Indian Stories" every issue until it changed its moniker to *Famous Western Badmen* for its

final three issues (Dec. 1952-April 1953). Violent war action characterized *Attack!* (eight issues, May 1952-Jan. 1953; this title was continued by two successive publishers until 1958) and the harrowing horrors of "Tomorrow's War" in *Atomic Attack!* (eight issues, Jan. 1953-Oct. 1953). Unless you were a philatelist, Youthful's least rousing title was undoubtedly *Adventures in Stamps Comics* (aka *Stamps Comics*, Oct. 1951-Jan. 1953), which nonetheless boasted art by Doug Wildey, Rudy Palais, Roy Krenkel, and H.C. Kiefer through its eight-issue lifespan.

It is difficult to sort out Youthful Magazines' opportunistic changing of titles and contents on a single series, much less the exchanging of properties between companies as Youthful's fortunes (or, perhaps, their role as printer vs. publisher) waxed and waned during their three-year excursion into comics.

[Stay with me, now — this is the kind of lunacy that makes comicbook collectors so anal-retentive.]

Consider, if you will, Youthful's "love" comics.

The boom in "romance" titles aimed at young female readers caught Youthful's attention, prompting Youthful to pick up the title *Youthful Romances* from Pix-Parade/Ribage Publishing (which had already published fourteen issues from 1949-52), changing it to *Darling Love* for three issues (Dec. 1952-April 1953) until it was in turn acquired by Ribage/Trojan Publishing, where it completed its run as *Youthful Romances* (ending May 1954; as we shall see, other Youthful titles were linked with the Ribage/Trojan fold). In the meantime, Youthful caught the wave with their own romance titles, *Youthful Love* (May 1950), which was retitled *Truthful Love* for its second and final issue (July 1950). They returned to the fold with *Youthful Heart* (May-Sept. 1952), which became *Daring Confessions* with its fourth issue (Nov. 1952, featuring "The Tony Curtis Story"), mixing standard romance comics soap operatics with "Exciting Stories about Stars of Radio, TV, and Movies" until it ended with its eighth issue (Oct. 1953).

No doubt, more heart-breaking events took place behind the scenes at Youthful than between the covers of *Youthful Love*. Whatever business practices, failures, or changes prompted Youthful's quiet departure from the comics' racks by the end of 1953, they were at least fortunate in having abandoned the field before the cataclysmic events of 1954 brought the entire industry to its knees in a public arena of scorn and revulsion.

Like Youthful Magazines, the horror comics boom lasted a little over three years, from 1951 to 1954. Though a couple of stray one-shot horror comics had surfaced since 1946, the first continuous periodical horror comic, American Comics Group's long-lasting (until 1967!) *Adventures into the Unknown*, hit the stands in the fall of 1948. ACG began adding other horror titles to their lineup in 1951, by which time the infamous EC Comics unholy trinity — *Vault of Horror*, *Haunt of Fear*, and *Crypt of Terror* (soon changed to *Tales from the Crypt*) — were celebrating their first birthday. According to comics historian Michael Benton, in 1952 horror comics "reached a peak publication of approximately one hundred and fifty titles — nearly thirty percent of all the comic books published that year" (quoted from Benton's *The Comic Book in America: An Illustrated History*, Taylor Publishing Co., 1989, 1993, page 160). Marvel Comics alone published twenty-five titles, arguably publishing more gruesome horror than any competitor. Many of these titles were printed in Holyoke.

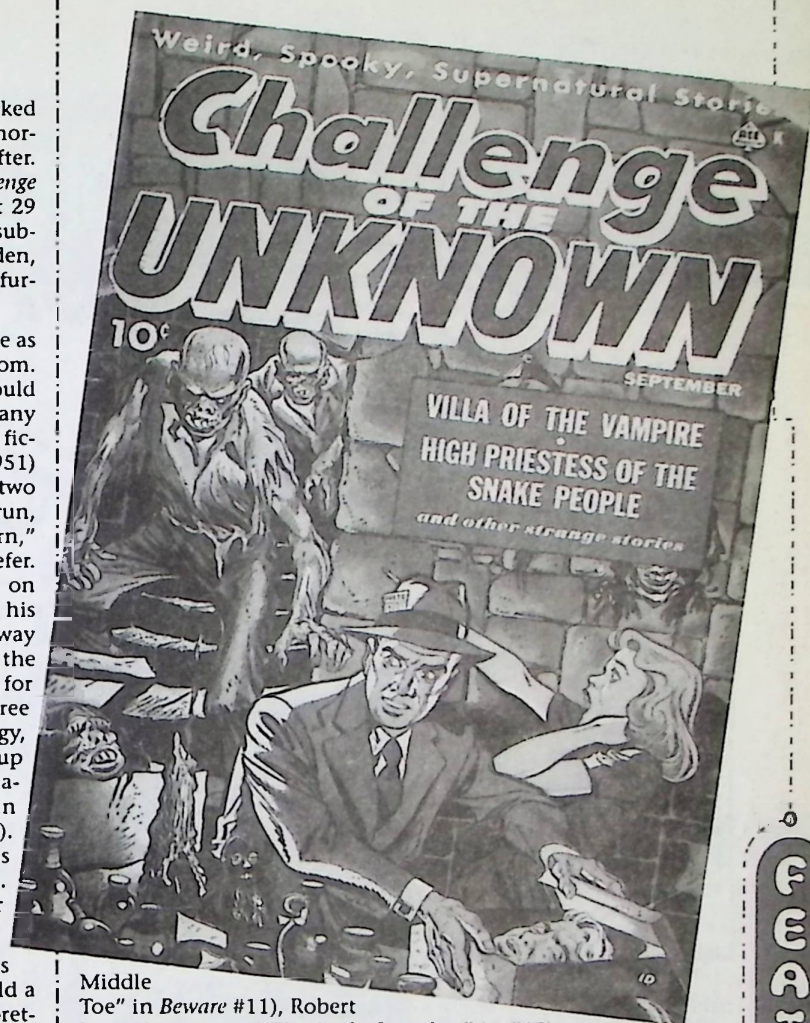
Ace Magazines eased into the fold with the one-shot title

Challenge of the Unknown #6 (September 1950), which picked up its numbering from *Love Experiences* for a single issue of horror before resuming its romantic title and content thereafter. Though Ace was editorially based in New York City, *Challenge of the Unknown*'s indicia lists Springfield, Massachusetts (at 29 Worthington Street) as its publication base, though Ace's subsequent horror series (*Web of Mystery*, etc.) indicate Meriden, Connecticut was their base of operations — a subject for further research.

Meanwhile, the Holyoke horrors began to take shape as Youthful side-stepped into the horror comics boom. Like chameleons, titles with declining sales could change color and content as necessary to match and catch any rising popular fad. Hence, Youthful's entry in the science fiction hero sweepstakes *Captain Science* (Nov. 1950-Dec. 1951) metamorphosed with its eighth issue into *Fantastic* for two issues (Feb.-April 1952). *Fantastic* #8, first of the two-issue run, featured the self-described "Dinosaur in Grandfather's Barn," lavishly illustrated by *Classics Illustrated* veteran H.C. Kiefer. Dinosaurs also figure in the lead feature "Captain Science on the Isle of Madness," though the Captain soon forfeited his spotlight as monster-filled science-fantasy adventures gave way to increasingly grim horror fare. By what would have been the Captain's tenth issue (or *Fantastic*'s third), he was gone for good as the title changed anew to the all-horror *Beware* (three issues, June-October 1952; to further confuse this chronology, Ribage/Trojan subsequently published *Beware*, picking up with #13 and continuing publication through 1955 in affiliation with another comics firm co-owned by Trojan Magazines' Michael and Stanley Estrow, Merit Publishing). With number thirteen, Youthful shifted titles once again as *Beware* became *Chilling Tales* (five issues, Dec. 1952-Oct. 1953), remaining a tried-and-true horror comic to the bitter end.

Beware and *Chilling Tales* were unexceptional examples of their genre, representing neither the best (they can't hold a candle to the EC line) or worst of the boom, but they were pretty entertaining. A few of the original stories are memorably twisted and consistently feature imaginative monsters, the standout entry being "My Daddy Should Have Listened" (*Beware* #12), in which a celebrated *Beware* horror cartoonist is driven into the loony bin by the genuine monsters that hang out with his own young son and his "imaginary" playmate Willie. The uncredited art job is particularly evocative and inspired. The Youthful line also boasted covers and the occasional story by veteran Matt Fox, whose distinctive primitive renderings of demons, ghouls, and monsters had enlivened the classic horror pulp magazines of the 1940s. Stamford, Connecticut native Harry Harrison also drew many stories for the Youthful line (including *Captain Science* tales) while selling illustrations to science fiction pulp magazines. Harrison's art was, at best, competent but undistinguished; he distinguished himself only after he abandoned cartooning to write science fiction, including the dystopian population explosion novel *Make Room, Make Room* (filmed in 1971 as *Soylent Green*).

Characteristic of the entire horror boom, most of the plots were pilfered from other uncredited sources. John Campbell's classic tale of an alien shape-shifter "Who Goes There?" (filmed in 1951 as *The Thing* and, closer to the original, as John Carpenter's 1981 remake) becomes "The Murderous Mimics!" in *Beware* #11, Robert Bloch's short story "The Skull of the Marquis DeSade" is distilled into "The Screaming Skull" (*Chilling Tales* #13), and so on. What distinguished Youthful's horror titles were the adaptations of Ambrose Bierce ("The



Middle Toe" in *Beware* #11), Robert Louis Stevenson ("The Body Snatcher" in #12), Samuel Taylor Coleridge ("The Ancient Mariner" in *Chilling Tales* #15) Rudyard Kipling ("The Mark of the Beast" in #16), Sir Walter Scott ("The Strange Tale of Wandering Willie" in #17), and Edgar Allan Poe ("Metzengerstein" in #16 and "MS Found in a Bottle" in #17). The adaptation of Kipling's tale of retribution against a British colonial who desecrates a Hindu altar, and is infected with a form of lycanthropy after being bitten by a monstrous leper, remains the highlight of the entire line, thanks in part to H.C. Kiefer's fine art job and the strength of its source material.

Even as *Chilling Tales* published its finest efforts, Youthful Magazines was apparently already closing up shop. While active comics publishers in Connecticut and New York raised the ante by escalating their graphic horrors, the Youthful line vanished into the night with nary a whisper, distancing themselves from the slaughter to come.

Though the Youthful Magazine horrors were relatively bloodless, they were inevitably swept up into the anti-comics hysteria that had built frightening momentum by 1953. When Dr. Fredric Wertham galvanized the anti-comics movement that year with the publication of his book *Seduction of the Innocent*, the climax of "My Daddy Should Have Listened" from *Beware* #12 was cited in the text (a gruesome image from Trojan's continuation of the series also graced the good doctor's

Continued on page 42

weird



A BRIEF HISTORY OF *Scat*[®] Comics Gazette

In 1975 I taught a cartoon workshop at UMass. I was surprised when my "students" cited as their greatest influence Marvel's Jack Kirby, a name barely known to me. My ignorance was apparent when Marty Maceda brought in *Spiderman* #1.

"That's nice," I said, unaware of its value.

Then John Hayman gave me — yes, gave me — *Conan* #4, which I used as a teaching aid until it fell apart. Clearly, I had a lot to learn, and not just about cartoons.

We formed the Pioneer Valley Graphics Guild, "an association of loose cartoonists." During a trip to New York City we ran through the streets like Shriners. We found time to attend a comic book convention and made a point of visiting the booth of a Northampton dealer. As I took a comic out of its plastic sleeve, one of his minions, a balding little man yelled at me, "You can't read that! Put it back!"

How absurd, I thought, to put a book in a sleeve, never to read it. The PVGG was a hands-on group, even when we made a mess of things, which was often the case when we appeared at the New England Artists Festival every spring, exhibiting our efforts — unsleeved.

In 1979 Marty and Peter Laird listed the cartoonists in the valley — enough to fill a magazine. Marty urged me to talk to Laird who ran The Little Used Book Store in a closet at 56 Main Street. Laird sat at the end of the cramped space, hunched over his drawings, from where he stole owlish, sidelong glances at patrons who squeezed in one or two at a time. Unhappily, I recognized him as the comic book grouch, the guy at the convention who had yelled at me.

I inched up, introduced myself, taking care not to touch the vintage comics or *Star Wars* figures on his shelves. Why not debut the magazine at the PVGG exhibit at the Festival, I suggested, and he

agreed.

Little did I know I was signing away three years of my life!

From the *Advocate* we recruited Bill Muller, a thin, soft-spoken paste-up artist with tiny eyes. Muller spent hours in seclusion, devising layout grids and ad rate tables, teaching himself the principles of design and publishing. Whenever he retreated into his room, we knew he was redesigning

some aspect of the magazine, an unnerving prospect.

Marty's wife, Denny Maloney was working full time and helping with the *Valley Women's Voice*, an exhausting schedule, but in her exhaustion she soon had company.

Achieving group cohesion proved daunting. Marty was as likely to do chin-ups on a water pipe as he was to direct a meeting, and he teased anyone who attempted to concentrate the group mind. But he was entertaining, God knows, and we needed his humor to guide us through the months of crushing work ahead.

Rob Engman was the perfect audience. His booming voice and convulsive laughter erupted at every wisecrack. And we greatly appreciated his buoyant spirits and eccentric charm. After meetings Rob often asked to be dropped at the nearest Ponderosa where he hoped to provide balance to his diet by gorging on the salad bar.

It was Rob who gave SCAT its name. None of us realized that "scat" also refers to an unappealing sexual fetish. Its connotations became clear to us when we received letters from a fetishist who wanted to contribute his scatology to our pages. No thank you, sir.



Bill Muller, Peter Laird, Brian Turner & Marty Maceda

SCAT

"Everyone must sell ads, we insisted.

Rob excused himself. He couldn't stomach ad sales, he said. We had lost a member before our first issue, not a good sign.

Marty and Bill did the paste-up, leaving the bulk of the sales to Laird, Denny, and me. Laird didn't have a car, so he canvassed downtown. (He especially liked talking to the women in Thornes, he said.) Since I had a car, I was stuck selling ads to printers such as Norman Newell, a just man, but not as comely as "Betsy of Chona."

Several hours later I walked into The Little Used Book Store with \$250. Laird had collected over \$150. Denny had outdone us all, selling the back cover for the next 10 issues!

After an all-night production session, we drove the flats to Star Press. Jordan Oakley collected 10,000 copies in his truck. We were about to drop some at the Iron Horse, when Muller came loping up Center Street. He grabbed a copy, let out an eerie, high-pitched scream, then rushed home to redesign it.

Denny contributed a feminist feature, "A Woman's Place." Marty did a strip, "Devoid Lives." Laird's neo-barbarian tale featured a talking dragon, "Wyrms." (Marty couldn't resist reciting Sir Wyrms's dialogue in the suave voice of Ronald Coleman.)

Steve Lafler's brushwork was wonderfully fluid, his contributions, the unmediated product of his unconscious. Gruff, chain-smoking Don Brunelle from Holyoke contributed whimsical gags. John Hayman sent us "delightfully idiotic" strips from Cambridge, and promised to return as soon as he could.

Other contributors included Gary Howe, Karen Kurt, Rob Ranney, Gary Johnson, Berkeley Brown, Al Edelstein, Al Silberberg, Leigh Catchepaugh, Kate Swol, Eddie Gallo, Stan Kulikowski, Phil Marden, Mike Moyle, George Phillips, Greg Grinnell, Michael Kasper, Peter Thelin, Bruce Colthart, Nancy Ostrovsky.



Peter Laird, Denny Maloney, Renrut, Bill Muller, Marty Maceda & Denny Maloney



clothes. Marty walked into the plate glass with a thud, found the door only after an effort. With Jordan on his lap, he improvised a bit he called the Unknown Ventriloquist and his alcoholic dummy, sharing with me the particulars of their lost weekend.

After SCAT #4 Peter Laird resigned, saying he wanted to concentrate on his artwork. He asked us to keep running "Wyrms," and we agreed, not because we loved the strip, but because we coveted his cover art. We did, however, relieve him of his Thornes accounts.

Inexplicably outraged, he withdrew "Wyrms."

Our top artist gone! A crisis!



But Don Brunelle took over and provided yeoman-like service on production nights. John Hayman became art coordinator, arranging for a review in *Heavy Metal*. The reviewer, Jay Kinney, declared, "There should be a magazine like

We staged a Cartoon Jamboree to which artists and non-artists were invited; everyone had to bring a cartoon. By midnight Jordan Oakley and Marty Maceda were imitating the Unknown Comic, shoving each other and shouting, "Chuckie! Chuckie!" After the beer ran out, they left for the bars, cackling and jabbering into the night.

Two days later I was in Bonducci's, now Bart's, reading the Sunday paper. Who should come staggering down Main Street but Marty and Jordan, wearing the same



Raw Rider

SCAT in every town in America."

With only sweat equity to show for our efforts, some cracks in our equanimity began to appear. As the magazine's only ad rep, I knew I had reached my limit when I awoke one night screaming that people were coming to my apartment to buy ads.

And we were starting to laugh alike, a swift, percussive "huh" (or Marty's version, "meh,") emitted in voices high and low. When we reviewed a submission that amused us, "huh" and "meh" went up all around like the honking of geese.

After some months I asked to be excused from production. Bill, Marty, and Don continued to suffer through the all-night sessions while I stayed home and slept. Or tried to. Marty called me at 3 a.m., "just to let you know we're thinking of you," then hung up.

It would seem that Peter Laird was wise to take his leave when he did.

After our first year we printed *Best of SCAT* with a glossy cover, which we sold for a dollar, but apart from the guy who walked into Main Street Records and bought every copy, handing them out to passersby, our first attempt at newsstand sales produced only modest results. We hired a salesman, Cliff. Sales increased; circulation climbed to 30,000. And yet our "sales manager," as Cliff wished to be known, pushed for more non-cartoon features, restaurant reviews and listings. He also claimed that we were too critical of Ronald Reagan.

"People love that knuckle-head," Cliff said, an accurate reading of the public mood.

Then he added, upon leaving us, "Your logic and my logic don't agree."

Our next salesman, Del, believed pinball machines were sending him messages. He called us before deadline to say he was picking up ad copy, then never showed. Later he confessed that he had been in a bar. He said he was playing a machine called the "Delux," but only the "Del" lit up, flashing at him, and since Del was his name, he took it personally.

"It was telling me I was behind the eight ball, man," he said.

Ironically, the magazine was better than ever — sharper, funnier. But poor sales forced us to skip an issue. During an emergency meeting we decided to dump the ads, the listings, the reviews, run more comics and parodies. The plan was to put out free issues of SCAT through Christmas, then shift to newsstand sales.

It was a Godsend when Ronald Reagan's "art" appeared in the *Gazette*. Reagan was so disengaged at cabinet meetings that he filled White House stationery with inane doodles. We popped some on our cover and called them "submissions."

by Ronald Reagan



Don Brunelle bought a fake monster hand with disfigured fingers, then planted a fat pen in it. Using a stat camera, Bill Muller shot the cartoons along with the monster hand to create the "illusion" that this was Reagan's own

gnarled mitt. I wrote an essay calling Reagan's doodles the "first post-modern" cartoons. We sent a check for \$20 to the White House, which they returned without cashing.

WTIC-TV sent a crew to cover this hoax. The reporter, Saida Pagan, pressed us to explain the "significance" of the monster hand. We said that we only wished to celebrate the works of our beloved leader. Then, stocking up on beer, we gathered to watch the interview on TV that night, a last hurrah.

By the time we were done we had churned out 25 issues between May, 1979 and December 1981. The fact that I had single-handedly distributed 555,000 magazines seems impossible now.

In 1982 we put together, but never printed, a newsstand SCAT (including a story by a young Kevin Eastman). But when distributors told us we had to "guarantee" the sales, we decided it was too risky. So we put the flats in a drawer. SCAT had breathed its last.

Will collectors slip SCAT into plastic sleeves or hoard Renrut action figures? I doubt it, and even if they did, that wouldn't be the important thing. I don't think I'm being nostalgic when I say that SCAT had its rewards. I'd do it again, even knowing the outcome, if only for all the fellowship that came with all the work.



The young Rut

Bill Muller owns Guild Art Center. Marty Maceda is a driving instructor/stand-up comedian in California. Denny Maloney's second husband hit the lottery for \$100,000. One of the nicest guys in the world, John Hayman, teaches at Amherst Middle School. Rob Ranney's cartoons appear in *Mercantile* ads. Rob Engman is a graphic designer and Art Director for VMag. Like Rob, Don Brunelle also does design work on computer. Gary Howe is in human services. Steve Lafler has published many deeply strange comic books. Leigh Catchepaugh "borrows" music to which he adds lyrics, performing as "Raymond and the Circle." George Phillips does illustrations for *Hampshire Life*. Nancy Ostrovsky paints portraits of musicians. Michael Kasper received \$5000 from the Xeric Foundation (see below). Eddie Gallo spends his days surveying the downtown Noho scene. Al Edelstein received an Oscar nomination for his documentary, *Wizard of the Strings*. Phil Marden is an artist in New York. Ronald Reagan is in the last stages of Alzheimer's. With his many millions Kevin Eastman purchased *Heavy Metal*. Peter Laird, too, is wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice; he dispenses grants through the Xeric Foundation (see above). Renrut wrote this all true tale. In memoriam, Jordan Oakley.

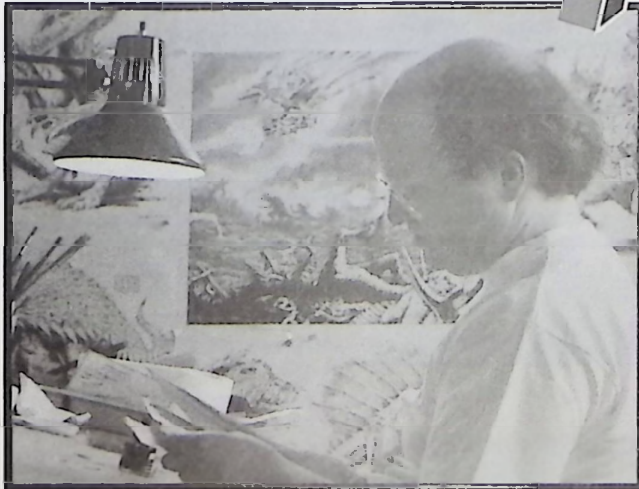
VMAG



by Murphy

(Extremely abridged:) In May of 1984 two young artists living off of Kraft Macaroni and Cheese — Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird — released the first issue of a black and white comic book they had mutually created, written and drawn. The title: Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. The result (for those of you new to Earth): billions of dollars in global sales of Ninja Turtles toys, action figures, apparel, food products, etc. (if you can think of the object, it came out with a Ninja Turtle on it); not to mention hundreds of cartoons, three motion pictures and, most recently, a new live action TV series on Fox. Fifteen years after that first 40-page comic Eastman and Laird's creative output hasn't waned, nor has their giving back to the community; via supporting local arts groups and charities, as well as through Laird's Xeric Foundation and Eastman's Words and Pictures Museum. The following interviews (getting to these guys when together isn't easy) took place in mid-January.

CATCHING UP WITH EASTMAN AND LAIRD



CREATORS

Q: What TMNT-related achievement are you most proud of?

PL: It's a toss-up — either the fact that these characters I co-created have brought joy to millions of people around the world, or the fact that the money I made from the TMNT allowed me to start the Xeric Foundation.

KE: By far, it would be publishing the first issue. As it was at that point for me the life-long dream come true. Even if there had never been another issue — or "Turtlemania" — I would always have that first taste and would have been satisfied with that.

PL: I would bring in the legal and accounting minds earlier (at the beginning, preferably) and learn about that side of things ahead of time, rather than "on the job." I would also try to be more observant.

Q: If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently?

KE: As we all know, hindsight is 20/20 and there are *many, many, many* things I would have done differently for a wide variety of personal reasons. But, whereas we can't unring a bell, I'll keep those to myself and be content with learning from the many mistakes.

PL: Yes.

Q: Any regrets?

KE: Far too many to list. They would fill several issues of *VMag* — so I'll take the "5th" for those not covered in my answer to the previous question.

PL: I have several. I'd like to do a sequel to the Donatello micro-series; an Archie TMNT/Mirage TMNT crossover with Ken Mitchroney; another *Usagi Yojimbo/Turtles* crossover; and something I came up with called "Turtle Force." I'd also like to see the future TMNT story Kevin and I came up with years ago come to pass... but that's unlikely.

Q: Do you have a Ninja Turtle story you'd like to someday tell?

KE: Yes, most definitely — in fact, it's something I've been developing for quite a few years now on my own. It would pretty much be my final (and personal) visit with the Turtles. But, in the meantime, I would like to do a follow-up to the Simon Bisley collaboration called *Body Count*, as well as work with Pete on another TMNT yarn — sorta like in the "old days."

PL: A few months ago... but that doesn't happen much these days. Most of my drawing is for *Planet Racers* or Funatix!, the toy design group I'm part of.

Q: When was the last time you drew a (fully rendered) Turtle?

KE: I'm currently painting (I'm about 3/4's done) a 30x40 of Venus de Milo — the female Turtle that was added to the live action show in 1997. Perhaps the painting will be finished by the time this goes to press, depending on my schedule. I also did some finished designs for the live action series.

PL: Probably the ability to get really cool presents for people (including myself).

Q: What's the best thing about having millions of dollars?

KE: Having people ask you "What's the best thing about having millions of dollars?" Also having people ask you if you would mortgage their house while they're out there pumping your gas while you're visiting your hometown. Plus, there are all those folks that "used" to know you way back when and who are now really pissed at you cuz you didn't give them enough, or any at all... However, spoiling my family a bunch and building the Words and Pictures Museum was pretty cool.

PL: The parasites.

Q: And the worst?

KE: The same answer as to the third question above — far too many to list.

PL: Why not? It's a great area — beautiful, exciting, lots to do... plus family, friends, business. And lots of great motorcycling roads.

Q: You could live anywhere in the world, yet you remain in this area; why?

KE: I think *some* of the nicest people in the world live here and I already own a home here. Also, this area has some history for me — I met Peter Laird here; I made millions of dollars from my share of a business located here; I lost some of those same millions here — I guess I want to stay around long enough to see what happens next!

PL: I like the variety of everything. I like the Connecticut River. I like the restaurants and bookstores and coffee shops. I like the mountains. I like the motocross races in Southwick.

Q: What do you like most about the Valley?

KE: Its history (before me), its values, and its lack of really tall buildings.

PL: I would make winter warmer, shorter, and have rain instead of snow.

Q: If you could change one thing about the Valley, what would it be?

KE: Can't think of a thing.

PL: If you're talking comics, I'd have to say Jack Kirby. If you're referring to life, I'd have to say my family and my friends at Mirage.

Q: Who (or what) are your greatest influences?

KE: My mom for her sense of values and hardworking attitude, both of which helped me arrive at where I am today. Artistically, Jack Kirby, the greatest comic artist/writer/creator of our time.

PL: I don't know yet.

Q: Who (or what) is your muse?

KE: I'm still waiting for mine. Puberty came late as well.

PL: Energy, enthusiasm, drawing talent, and an off-beat sense of humor.

Q: What is the greatest thing your partner brought to your Turtles/Mirage creative partnership?

KE: Someone who would do half the work. Just kidding. For a short period of time in the early days of the TMNTs we shared the same brain — if you will — forming the foundation of what would become what they have become. Also, Pete is eight years older and had eight years more experience to pass on to my naive self in the early years.

PL: In comics, it's *Planet Racers*, the trilogy of graphic novels I'm doing with my pal Jim Lawson. It combines several of my greatest interests — motorcycles, science fiction, and comics. And working with Jim is great — he's a wonderful comics artist. This project is also giving me a chance to learn how to letter comics with the computer.

Q: What current project(s) are you most passionate about?

KE: I really enjoy editing *Heavy Metal Magazine* and working on the new live action TMNT show: mainly because if those remain successful, I can keep the Words and Pictures Museum open.

PL: Comics have to recover from the brutal beating they took during the "Speculator Wars" of a few years back, which seriously damaged the infrastructure which supports the comics industry. Whether Marvel survives or merges with DC is irrelevant — comics will continue as a (relatively) cheap, portable, disposable entertainment.

Q: Marvel Comics keeps flirting with Chapter 11 if not dissolution, comic book sales are down for most American publishers and, arguably, computer and video games have hurt comics irreparably... so, what kind of future is there for comic books in America?

KE: One of the pioneers of comics as we know them, Will Eisner, once said: "In my lifetime I've seen the comics industry die six times." The current market is "down" to the level where the people that are still in it, and still enjoying it, are the *readers* — the core audience. They have always been

Actually, I have a theory that both Marvel and DC are reaching a point of "critical mass" with their respective histories, characters, and continuities, where they will implode from the sheer accumulated weight of decades. Think about it — what would it take for someone to read all of the stories of, say, the Fantastic Four, or Spider-Man, or Batman? It would be a huge effort (and expense) just to gather all that material together, and even then it would probably be a terribly unsatisfying experience — trying to reconcile all of the different styles and approaches of the art and writing teams over the years.

there — they were there for both of the last "boom" and "bust." I believe a "boom" takes place when thousands of idiots suddenly think they are going to strike it rich by collecting comics and so start buying loads of books that shortly aren't worth the paper they're printed on and leave this fad for something else, thus we have a "bust." The *readers* are there all along.

I hope that small companies and self-publishers continue to pop-up and produce the kind of work that makes going into a comic shop a worthwhile experience.

While it can be fun to go to different Internet web sites and see comics on your computer monitor, I doubt that it's ever going to be as satisfying or as practical as experiencing a printed comic book. In that regard, it may actually be the often reviled collecting hobby which saves comics — there's not much satisfaction in collecting the digital form of anything.

PL: Who knows?

Q: What's the future hold in store for Mirage Studios?

KE: Mirage Studios exists because of the Turtles. As long as people keep finding something interesting about the Turtles, Mirage Studios will continue to exist. Beyond that there are no future plans!

PL: The Thing, from the Fantastic Four, from the Kirby/Lee period. Not only was he a great tortured-yet-noble salt of the earth type, but as Kirby drew him he was a graphic treat.

Q: Who or what is your favorite cartoon or comic book character, and why?

KE: I don't really have any anymore. I used to like Tigger from Winnie the Pooh because he was sort of oblivious and happy — kinda like how I used to be. I also thought Kamandi the Last Boy on Earth was pretty cool. Kamandi was a Kirby creation. Not much else out there today impresses me.

PL: The inventor of the first practical time machine.

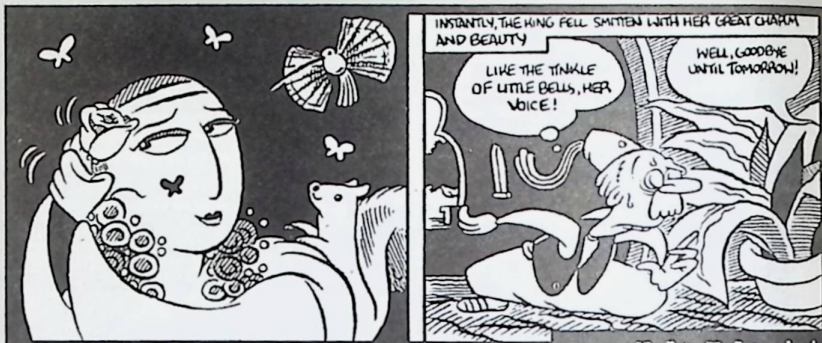
Q: What would you like to be in your next life?

KE: A very small rock on a warm beach.

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by Robert Boyd

In 1984, Northampton cartoonists Peter Laird and Kevin Eastman cobbled together \$1,200 to print 3,000 copies of their comic book, the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Neither could have foreseen where the *Turtles* would end up -- the movies, the TV show, the licensing bonanza that made both men wealthy. Each in his own way has dug into his pockets to give something back to the art form that gave them their start, Eastman with the Words & Pictures Museum, and Laird with the Xeric foundation. The Xeric Foundation awards grants to cartoonists who wish to publish their own work. In a way, Laird has



Walt Holcombe's
THE KING OF PERSIA

If Peter Laird were a publisher and the 50 comics were what he'd published since 1992, he'd be one of the most talked-about figures in the biz -- people would marvel at the artistic breadth of his line, scratch their head at some of the things he had put out while lauding his vision in publishing many of his other projects. But the Xeric Foundation keeps a low profile. It has three permanent members, and there are two distribution committees, one for the local grants and one for the

MARKING THE BLOOM COMIC DESERT THE The Xeric Foundation

created an institutional mechanism that lets cartoonists start at precisely the same point that he and Eastman started - self-publishing a comic book. And while none of the grant recipients have spun their work into a fortune like Laird's, these cartoonists are the most vital young voices in the comics world today.

The Xeric Foundation was started in 1992 with an endowment of one million dollars. Each year, the Foundation takes the interest on that million and gives it away in the form of grants. In addition to cartoonists, local charities and nonprofit organizations can get grants (as long as they reside in the 413 area code). The grant money is split evenly between cartoonists and charities. Xeric has given away more than \$465,000 dollars so far. This includes financing 50 comics and graphic novels.

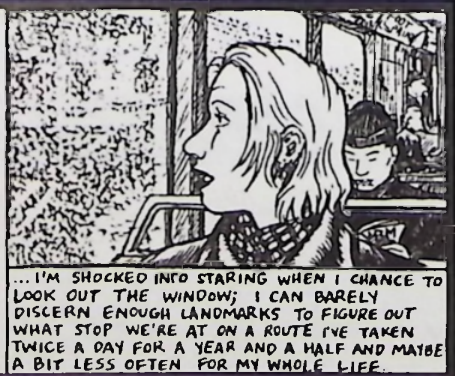
comic grants. The comic distribution committee, composed of editors and artists from the field, is kept anonymous.

Grants are given out twice a year. The largest number of applicants for the comics grant Xeric has ever received is 75.

"The last batch was bigger than it had been in the past," explains Kendall Clark Engelman, the Secretary-Treasurer of the Xeric Foundation. "That can be attributed somewhat to a little article that appeared in *Wizard*." (*Wizard* is a comics fan magazine with a very high circulation.)

Compare this number with the number of unsolicited submissions the average commercial comic publisher gets. It can range from hundreds to thousands every year. In part this is attributable to the low profile Xeric maintains, but it also has something to do with the rigorous application procedure. In addition to a project which, according to the official literature, must be "complete or near completion," applicants must also provide "a detailed proposed budget/disbursement of funds for the amount requested." That means cartoonists must get bids from printers, must talk to service bureaus about prices, must figure out how much ads cost -- issues one rarely contemplates while sitting behind the drawing board. Xeric expects a

SITTING IN THE OVER-WARM, CROWDED TUBE, INCHING ITS WAY TO EVANSTON, READING A BOOK



... I'M SHOCKED INTO STARTING WHEN I CHANCE TO LOOK OUT THE WINDOW; I CAN BARELY DISCERN ENOUGH LANDMARKS TO FIGURE OUT WHAT STOP WE'RE AT ON A ROUTE I'VE TAKEN TWICE A DAY FOR A YEAR AND A HALF AND MAYBE A BIT LESS OFTEN FOR MY WHOLE LIFE.

Jessica Abel's
ARTBABE

level of seriousness of its applicants which weeds out those who feel they deserve a grant because they can draw Spider-Man real good.

"I heard through *The Comics Journal* about some higher quality young cartoonists like Jason Lutes, Steven Blue, and a few others whose work I admired getting the award," says Houston cartoonist Scott Gilbert, who received a Xeric grant for his book, *It's All True!*, in 1995. "I was impressed with the level of good work that the Xeric folks seemed to sponsor. Xeric struck me as one of the few art grants I had ever heard of that was actually awarded on the basis of merit."

Jessica Abel, who got the grant for her comic *Artbabe* also

of the cartoonists, self-publishing is a means, not a goal.

"I wasn't interested in self-publishing, but it seemed the best, and only, option for me at the time," Abel says. But once she completed her Xeric-financed issue of *Artbabe*, she was ready to shop the title around. Currently, *Artbabe* is being published by Fantagraphics Books.

Matthew Smith believes the goal of the Xeric grant is "to promote self-publishing." But he adds that "in reality it seems to be a step to get something out to show to publishers." Indeed, a high number of Xeric titles have moved from self-publishing to publishing -- Tom Hart (*Hutch Owen's Working Hard*) and Jason Lutes (*Jar of Fools*) now do comics for Black

Eye, Adrian Tomine's *Optic Nerve* moved on to Drawn & Quarterly, Randy Reynaldo moved his *Adventure Strip Digest* over to industry giant Image Comics, Walt Holcombe (*The King of Persia*) now does a comic for Fantagraphics, etc. And Pappalardo and Smith retooled *Alec Dear* and got it published by Caliber Comics under the title *Through the Wood, Beneath the Moon*.

"It's like the music industry where you start at Sub Pop and move to Geffen," explains Pappalardo.

There are tradeoffs when you allow someone else to publish your work. Smith and Pappalardo were happy to get a chance to improve their original story. "There are a lot of new pages in there, and there are ones that are re-done versions of old pages," says Smith.

"It's definitely a better book, and I was really proud of it," adds Pappalardo, "but they (Caliber) left out *full lines*. They spelled the main character's name wrong in a couple of places. And that kind of blows."

"Ideally, self-publishing would be the best option. However, considering the vast amount of work beyond the actual creation of the comic that is involved, and considering no cartoonist can currently make a living strictly off of his self-

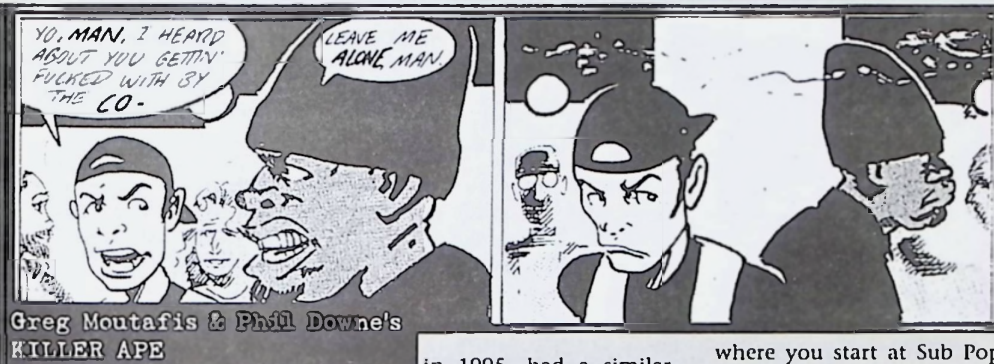
experience. "I knew several people who had won them, and I felt my work was at a comparable level to theirs at the time they won. I think it was just sort of in the air."

"I heard about it in high school from Greg Moutafis," says Tom Pappalardo, writer of *Alec Dear*. Northampton residents Pappalardo and Matt Smith collaborated (writing and drawing respectively) on this 1995 Xeric winner. The two of them attended high school together and knew Moutafis, who had graduated a couple of years before from the same high school. Moutafis got a Xeric grant in 1993 for his comic *Killer Ape*. Pappalardo tried for a Xeric in '94 and was turned down.

"I had written (Alec Dear) for my girlfriend as a joke," Pappalardo says. "Matt came over, read it and liked it." Smith then started drawing it as a comic. *Alec Dear* is a macabre but humorous narrative poem, and Smith's illustrations have a feeling a little like Edward Gorey crossed with *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Where do you go with an "uncommercial" project like *Alec Dear* but the Xeric Foundation? Smith submitted it when it was about one third done (which shows how loosely the "near completion" rule is observed) and got a grant.

Smith is unusual in that he didn't come from a comics background. Scott Gilbert has drawn his strip *True Artist Tales* for Houston newsweeklies for years; Jessica Abel had drawn four issues of *Artbabe* before getting the Xeric for her fifth; and Tom Pappalardo was editor of Mass Art's student comic book when he studied art there in addition to having applied for a Xeric grant earlier. (Pappalardo applied and was turned down again in the last grant cycle. In the meantime, he and Smith are working on a sequel to *Alec Dear*.)

Engelman points out that the mission of the Xeric grant is to "help comic book creators who want to self-publish. It is an alternative and the way Peter Laird started out." But for many



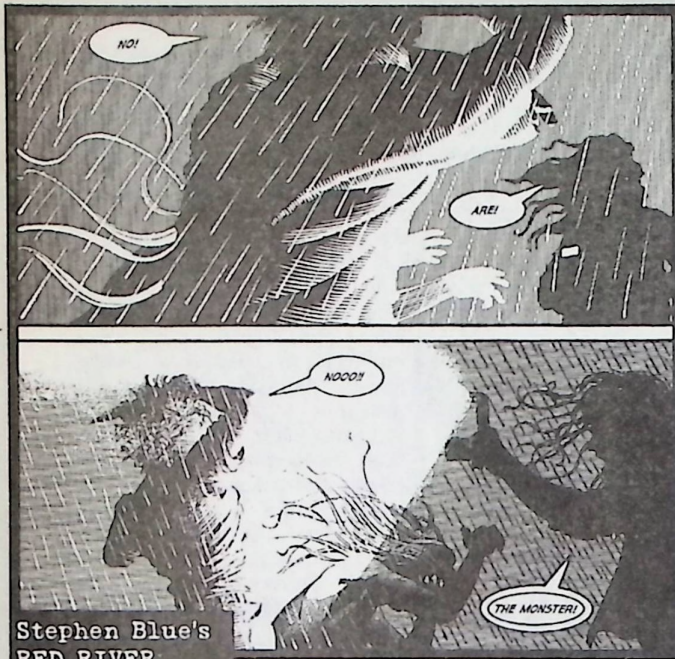
Greg Moutafis & Phil Downes's **KILLER APE**



James Sturm's **THE REVIVAL**

published book (aside from Jeff Smith [creator of *Bone*] and Dave Sim [creator of *Cerebus*] and maybe David Lapham [creator of *Stray Bullets*]), having a publisher seems like the most reasonable option," according to Scott Gilbert.

But he adds that "there is tremendous satisfaction in



Stephen Blue's
RED RIVER

putting the whole thing together, though.

Even taping up and shipping the boxes felt great." Smith agrees — "I like to have complete control over the project." So even though Gilbert, Abel, Smith and Pappalardo work with publishers, they still keep open the option of self-publishing.

Even if the Xeric grant doesn't, in the long run, create an army of successful self-publishers, it still does a lot of good for the applicants (above and beyond the financial help provided). "I think it has the effect on individual artists of making them take themselves much more seriously," states Abel. Even for those who don't get the grant, the application process is an eye-opener that forces themselves to take a hard look at what they're doing. Applicants (and winners) cannot afford the casual attitude many of them have when doing 'zines and micro-press comics.

"It just isn't the same doing a xerox comic and having a nationally-distributed professionally-printed comic," Abel adds.

And the proof is in the pudding. Not every comic that's gotten a Xeric is an aesthetic home-run, but plenty are. Jeff Nicholson's unnerving *Lost Laughter* and Steven Blue's high-polish *Red River* disturb readers in ways rarely seen in traditional horror comics. Megan Kelso created a serialized feminist epic in her 1993 winner *Girlhero*. Randy Reynaldo attempted to create a modern equivalent to classic adventure strips like *Terry & the Pirates* and *Johnny Hazard* with his *Adventure Strip Digest*. Art Baxter and Christine Shields create lushly drawn, highly-personal surrealisms with their comics *Spud* and *Blue Hole*. Ellen Forney casts a sociological eye on '70's culture in *I Was Seven in '75* that is every bit as incisive (and a lot more funny) than the film *The Ice Storm*. David Kelly looks at childhood in the '70's from a different point of view in his poignant *Steven's Comics*. James Sturm's *The Revival* tells of religious fervor and providence on the

American frontier at the beginning of the 19th century. Sturm writes on the last page of *The Revival* the following: "This book's very existence is due, in no small measure, to the Xeric Foundation. Their financial assistance allowed *The Revival* to see print. May this righteous institution prosper."

When asked about the meaning of the word Xeric, Kendall Clark Engelman said, "You can look it up. It's a word that has no personal meaning for Peter Laird. It's not a reflection of the Foundation or what it does." The Webster dictionary defines xeric as "characterized by, relating to, or requiring only a small amount of moisture." If the world of comics is a bleak desert of undistinguished cookie cutter superheroes and mindless violence, then the Xeric Foundation and the comics it has financed are like brilliant cactus flowers adding much-needed hope and beauty to the whole scene.

[If you have a comic you wish to self-publish, or if your non-profit organization has a project it needs financing, you can get a brochure from the Xeric Foundation by calling (413) 585-0671, e-mailing xericgrant@aol.com, or writing Xeric Foundation, 351 Pleasant St., #214, Northampton, MA 01060.]



"Lollipops for everyone! and then on unto death."

Matt Smith & Tom Pappalardo's
ALEC DEAR

A VMag interview with JOSEPH SCELSI, the new Director of Development and Finance at Northampton's Words & Pictures Museum.

Conducted by Murphy.

VMAG: So, Joe, what are your responsibilities as Director of Development and Finance?

JOE: Co-Chief Dishwasher and Bottle Scrubber. I share the responsibility with Co-Director Fiona Russell. More seriously, I'm responsible for strategic planning and for developing marketing and business plans, etc. It's one of those positions that requires the wearing of a number of different hats — sometimes all at the same time.

V: Tell us a bit about your professional background.

J: I grew up in a family business. Most recently, I have worked as a financial and marketing consultant to small businesses and have a number of years of experience in general management. Also, I'm a masters graduate from the University of MA School of Business.

V: What brought you to the Museum?

J: I was won over by the Museum through the years. My son (who is now 14) has been a real fan of the Museum since we were over at the Roundhouse Building. Initially, I was just transportation — literally brought along for the ride while providing the ride — but in time I grew to love the place. At first this was mostly due to the way we were treated. My son is a "collector" in the true sense of the word. For a time, when he was younger, he was looking for a limited *Lion King* card tin set and we couldn't get them anywhere, not even from Disney. We walked into the Museum on the off-chance that they could point us in the right direction. We met Fiona and she went out of her way for several weeks looking for those cards for us. That's one example. Need another?

Okay. On the opening day of the Museum here on Main Street, we were among the hundreds of people who waited in line to view the Museum. I think we were on the third floor when we spotted Kevin Eastman. He was sur-

rounded by a ton of people, all vying for his attention. My son was ten or eleven then. Kevin actually took the time to talk with him at length, ignoring the rest of the world around them. He was honestly interested in talking to my son, learning how he felt about comics and the Museum. I could see the pride in Eastman's face when he talked about the Museum. That proved a lot to me: Here was a man who was sincerely interested in sup-

porting a cause he believed in.

Beyond that, I often go to the fourth floor to look at the permanent collection. You know, so many things in life are mediocre... but each piece of art on the fourth floor are examples of an artist

putting his or her everything into the art; the best of human endeavors. And anything that promotes work like that, as the Museum does, needs to be supported. To be part of this gives me a sense of fulfillment.

That's what brought me here.

V: What unique perspective does your non-museum background bring to your job?

J: A new set of eyes. Perhaps a slightly different view of the world.

V: What, if any, changes will you bring to your role?

J: The role? Not so important a question as, *What changes would I like to bring to the Museum?* What I would really like to create for the Museum is its own identity. This will always be the favorite museum of the Ninja Turtles, but we need to develop our own personality too.

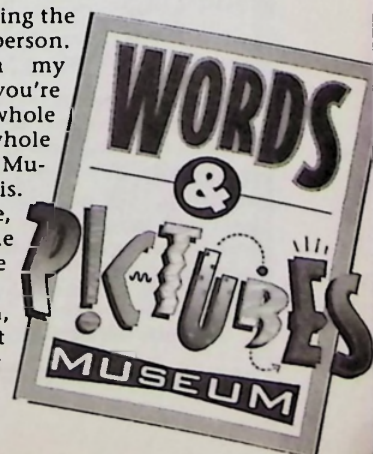
V: Could you explain the museum's fundraising goals? Is there a timeline for raising the endowment fund?

J: The Museum has an endowment goal of \$5 million, to be raised over the next five years.

V: The question I keep hearing is "Why doesn't (museum founder) Kevin Eastman just put up the \$5 million?" So... why doesn't he?

J: Seems like you're asking the wrong person. Okay, in my opinion you're missing the whole point. The whole point of the Museum, that is. Call me naive, but in all the years that I've frequented the Museum, that thought has never

VMAG GO JOE GO!



crossed my mind. I feel that the answer to your question is simple. For me, the Words & Pictures Museum is not a one-man (or four- or five-Turtle) show. It's here for everyone. It belongs to all of us! It's not a shrine to the Ninja Turtles. The Museum exists to preserve and promote the Art and most definitely to encourage creative thought and expression. Kevin is the visionary and he has laid the foundation through his generosity, but everyone needs to take an active role in helping the Museum take its next giant step. The Museum can change the way comic art is viewed, but it can only achieve this if more than one person is willing to invest the majority of resources. And by resources I don't mean just money, but rather commitment and involvement.

V: Got it. So, what, if any, is Kevin's current or ongoing role with the museum?

J: I have been told that Kevin has forgotten more about the collection than most people ever knew. So, in that respect, he is a great resource. He is often asked for his opinion and looked to for input regarding shows. His was the vision and his were the resources and contacts that have brought us to where we are now. Kevin is still the source of the undying enthusiasm and strength that keeps the Museum focused on the big picture... and the possibilities.

V: Last year the museum sent out a fundraising brochure to comic book professionals. How was the response?

J: Not as strong as it could have been.

V: What will you be doing to improve that response?

J: Talk to people like you that have the power of the pen. I mean that earnestly. You can be very instrumental in changing some shortsighted views of the Museum. You, and others like you, can make people aware of the big picture, the possibilities — if I dare use that term again. I think it will be key to broadening people's awareness of the mission and goals of the Museum. This is especially true with regards to industry professionals. It really is in everyone's best interest if the Museum succeeds, and certainly to everyone's detriment should it fail.

V: Have you been seeking corporate support?

J: Yes, and we will be stepping up these efforts in '98.

V: What about grants?

J: Affirmative again. We are working on several as we speak. In some cases, however, it is a very long process with no assurance of success in the end. You certainly can't put your hopes for total funding in this one basket. The majority will probably have to come from donations or other activities of the Museum.

V: By what means have you been reaching out for public support?

J: In a variety of ways. Obviously, by means of our endowment campaign. Also, through partnering with local businesses and various agencies. The Museum is really seeking a partnership with the community. A give-and-take relationship. We have been working very hard to develop a marketing program for the Museum. I think this will become more visible to the general public in the later part of the year. Good things often take time. We want to do it right.

V: Please define the role of the museum in the community.

J: To different groups this may mean different things. The Museum is definitely striving to become an active participant and partner in the community. Locally, we are a destination point. Our events draw patrons from all parts of the state and country, often in large numbers. More times than not, local restaurants, shops and hotels benefit economically more than we do from our event days. I think this is often overlooked. Also, downtown Northampton is a cool place. The Museum just makes it that much cooler. We help to differentiate Northampton from every other town. Where can you go and find another Words & Pictures? Northampton should revel in the fact that the Museum is here.

And we have a responsibility too. The Museum needs to continue to develop our outreach and educational programs both for children and adults. We need to become more involved in community organizations and to team-up where we can with other worthy causes.

In the greater community, the comic community, we have an important role. We are an accredited Museum of Art. As such, we are the preservers, protectors, promoters and validators of the art form. We have a responsibility to further the art, to help young artists, to establish comic art as a respected part of Americana. However, to do this we need the support of the comic art community as a whole and the comic artist as an individual.

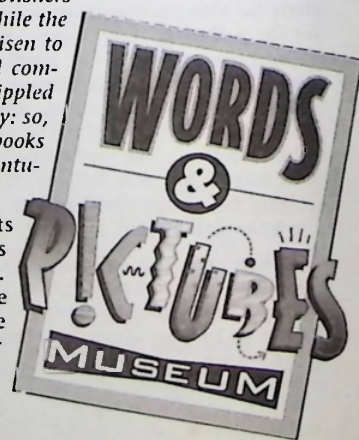
V: What else will be going on with the Museum in the near future?

J: The Museum will be closing down for the first two weeks in February, reopening on the 14th. However, the Museum Store will remain open during that entire period. We're closing so that we can change the permanent collection, the fourth floor. Some of the favorite pieces will remain, but after talking to members we realized that they'd like to see more of the roughly twenty thousand pieces that make up the collection. This will also give us the opportunity to catch up on some maintenance. It's been a couple of years since we opened at this location and it's important to appear fresh and alive. This will provide us with a bit of a face-lift and create some excitement as well.

When we first reopen, we will feature more of the permanent collection on the third floor, but in the spring the focus will change to an exhibit that features works published by Fantagraphics of Seattle. Summer will be filled with surprises, but that's enough about that now. Don't wanna ruin the excitement.

V: Marvel Comics keeps flirting with bankruptcy protection, comic book sales for most publishers are down across the country while the average cost of a comic has risen to \$3; and, arguably, video and computer games and the have crippled the comics industry irreparably: so, what makes you think comic books will survive into the 21st century?

J: Every industry has its peaks and valleys. Comics are in a slump, a valley. Comics will survive because they represent imaginative thought. They appeal to our sense of fantasy. The look



and feel of comics may change, but they'll still be around. It's hard to buy a vinyl record or an eight-track but there's still lots of good music to be heard.

V: What do you think the industry could do to bring new readers in?

J: A better job of marketing. The industry needs to put their heads together and address some common stereotypes regarding comics. Mainly, the widely held view in this country that comics are just for kids. That there gets to be a certain age when it's not cool to purchase them unless you view them as a collectible. Yet, thousands of people of all ages will go to a Batman movie, or a Crow, Superman, Mask, the list goes on. You get my point. We need to do more of what the milk industry — and a few years back, the raisin industry — were able to do. I mean, really; how exciting are dried-up grapes? Look at comics in comparison.

V: Dried-up capes. I hope I live to see the day when comics publishers all pull together. So, who's your favorite cartoon or comic book character, and why?

J: Cartoons, I'd have to say Bugs, or maybe Pinky and the Brain. Or maybe Batman the Animated Series. Wait a second — definitely Ninja Turtles. Regarding comics — never read them. They're for kids, you know. Honestly, though, I've really gotten to love The Tick in recent years.

V: Any closing thoughts?

J: Again, I'd like to stress that the Museum is here for everyone. We would like to change the perception that the Museum is only for Ninja Turtles fans, or Heavy Metal fans, or Kevin Eastman fans, for that matter. We are a non-profit, accredited museum. We give back to the community much more than we take out. I'd like to put out an invitation to fans and comics professionals alike to take a greater part in the Museum. If you want the Museum to be able to continue for the long term, you have to get involved.

V: Thanks, Joe. We wish you the best of luck with your endeavors.



VMAG Street Smarts

BY ROSCOE

Q: Who is your favorite cartoon or comic book character, and why?



Heather
Bradbury
21
Nurses Aide
Ashland

"All of the Winnie the Pooh characters. Pooh was faithful to his friends. And Eeyore is always depressed and full of advice that he doesn't follow himself."



Robert
Bradbury
57
Consultant
Lewiston, ME

"Wile E. Coyote. Even though he never caught the Roadrunner, I loved his ingenious ideas."



Shannon
Pickunka
11
Student
South Deerfield

"My favorite character is Tommy Pickles from the Rugrats. I like him because he is always on an adventure, and he is very cute!"



Nicholas
Pickunka
6
Student
South Deerfield

"My favorite character is Bugs Bunny because he is smart, cool and funny."



Ed Matyseck
52
Engineer
Westfield

"Alley Oop because he's a time traveler. He can adapt to any situation and any part of history."

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Street Smarts

An interview with DENIS KITCHEN of Kitchen Sink Comix.

Part 1

by Jim Zalesky

Jim Zalesky: Are you the first publisher of underground comics?

Denis Kitchen: We weren't the first but we are the oldest existing one. The first underground comics publisher is no longer in business. They started a year or two earlier, but we are the oldest independent comics publisher. We started in 1969.

J: And that started off as Kitchen Sink Press?

K: Kitchen Sink Press has always been the imprint. The overall company at that time was called Krupp Comic Works. We had a distribution division called Krupp Distribution. We had a head shop called Strictly Upper Crust. We had a comics division called Kitchen Sink Press and it was under the umbrella of Krupp. Later I divested the other elements and Kitchen Sink Press became the only name. It has always been the comic book imprint.

J: So you owned a head shop? Was that a place to sell comics?

K: Yeah. In the late 60's and early 70's head shops were the main outlets for underground comics because newsstand distributors wouldn't touch them. They were too controversial, and there were no comic specialty stores to speak of. Bookstores wouldn't carry them because they weren't books; they were comics and they weren't even good comics in their view, they were nasty hippy comics. We literally had no allies in those days except head shops. The truth is it was a pretty good distribution system; we sold a lot of comics. The only people that went into head shops were hippies, and these were comics for hippies, we didn't have to be anywhere else. Eventually head shops died very quickly.

J: Head shops seem to be making a comeback.

K: Yeah they are. It's interesting because pot doesn't go away and there is always someone who wants to sell paraphernalia related to it, literature related to it and all the cultural mementos. Underground comics are still out there. Today you have alternative comics, or whatever you want to call them, it's still the new generation's equivalent of underground comics. It's just that the guys drawing them generally don't have hair down the middle of their backs. Instead they have earrings and tattoos. I don't want to stereotype anyone but the only change is superficial. The critical thing from the comics' perspective is that comics that are anti-establishment, breaking taboos and breaking rules even after thirty years. I don't think that most people would have thought that alternative comics would have had a lifespan like that. Originally what held together the counter culture was underground newspapers and they didn't really survive. They survived only in a very truncated form. The weekly free papers that you see today are distant cousins of what underground newspapers were. They were very political, very outspoken and very psychedelic generally. They were what held together the elements of the counter culture in the late 60's and early 70's. They died very suddenly, yet the comics continued. And I think that surprised a lot of people who thought the comics were just a gimmick or an aberration.

J: What's the difference between mainstream comics and underground comics?

K: When I was growing up in the 50's and early 60's I loved comics, but comics for a while were really boring. In 1954 there

was the Comics Code Authority, there was a Senate investigation, a psy-

chiatrist wrote a best-selling book attacking comics (*Seduction of the Innocent*) and parents were afraid that comics were causing juvenile delinquency. So, under threat of government regulation, the comics industry created a self-regulating censorship board. And it really sucked the life out of a lot of comics. To be fair, from a parent's point of view there were some morbid and violent comics out there. Probably, parental discretion was called for, but to prohibit the comics industry from dealing with violence, horror and sex wasn't even an issue then. There were sexy comics, but they were not sexual in the sense that they are now. The people who were for comic book regulation said it was a juvenile medium and thus you can't do these things. Well to a large extent it was a juvenile medium but it didn't have to be. The generation of cartoonists that I come from looked around and said this is a medium we love, we want to do comics the way we want to do comics, and we don't want to be restricted by this artificial code.

We saw barriers being broken down in other mediums. The book industry had a couple of major cases with *Tropic of Cancer*. The film industry had a Swedish film, *I Am Curious Yellow*, which had some nudity. When the courts finally allowed it to be shown in the U.S., it broke the gates open for movies, just as Henry Miller had broken the gates open for books. We looked around and said why should comics be restricted? And when I say we, I mean people starting out like Robert Crumb, S. Clay Wilson, Art Spiegelman and a number of cartoonists who all began doing things fairly simultaneously in the late 60's. And I was caught up in that movement. Partly being aware and partly being caught up in it, we created a new genre that was a mutation of what we grew up with, which was mainstream comics.

J: What are mainstream comics?

K: For example, Marvel Comics or D.C. Comics. By mainstream I mean comics that are produced in large quantities and sold in drug stores or today mostly in comic shops by major publishers. Today they are still timid when it comes to subject matter. While comics are not literally for kids anymore, they are pretty much aimed at a teenage, college-age audience. The kinds

Everything

AND

the

Kitchen

Sink

of comics that Kitchen Sink is producing are comics which have a higher literary and artistic intent than mainstream comics. I say "intent" because it would be pretentious to say that ours are flat-out superior. Our intent is to create literary and artistic comics. I think it's safe to say that this is not the intention of the mainstream comic publishers. They are simply just trying to entertain and make a buck. We have to make a buck and to a large extent we also look to entertain, but we have pretensions of creating something of a more lasting quality most of the time. That's what sets us apart.

J: When you were in Wisconsin how did you hook up with Robert Crumb who was living in San Francisco selling his own comic books out of a baby carriage?

K: Initially he was, but that was just at the beginning when there was no method of distribution. He certainly did not want to sell comics out of a baby carriage. That was back in 1967 when literally he invented the genre with the very first underground comic. When I came on to the scene a year or two later there still wasn't any firm distribution system in place and one of the things I did that led me to become a publisher was that as a self-published cartoonist I helped create a distribution system that didn't exist before. All that it really meant was finding those head shops, those political newspaper distributors, those campus bookstores that were sympathetic, the independent bookstore that was willing to take a chance, and then putting together a network that eventually grew, and creating a mailing list and taking care of business. Most cartoonists had no interest in doing that, they just wanted to draw. I had a certain knack for business and so I evolved into a publisher. Crumb is someone I met when he was passing through the Midwest and a Chicago cartoonist brought him up to Milwaukee and introduced us and we hit it off. He promised me his next book. Which is what turned my company from a marginal tiny enterprise into a successful small enterprise.

J: Was that Homegrown Comics?

K: Yeah, which to this day still sells. It just went into its 16th or 17th printing.

J: So you were drawing your own comic book?

K: Yeah, originally it was called *Mom's Home-made Comics* with a subtitle, *Straight From The Kitchen To You*. It lasted three issues and I contributed to a lot of other books too. The whole business side ends up being very time consuming and it's very difficult to both create and take care of business.

J: Was the business end difficult in the beginning?

K: Well, because we basically were inventing an industry; there were no rules. So, one of the things I had to do was to decide what was fair. Since I had been a cartoonist I asked myself: If I was being published what would I expect? I would expect to be paid a fair royalty based on the number of books sold. I would expect to get my artwork back. I would expect to retain my own copyright. I would expect to have the final say in any adaptations, foreign sales and merchandise

spin-offs.

J: Is this treatment different from how a mainstream comic company, like D.C. or Marvel, would treat their artist?

K: In those cases the company would own the copyright completely. In those days they kept all the artwork and sometimes they even threw it away. If they adapted the work into a foreign language or a movie the original creator received nothing. It was to me and my generation of cartoonists clearly a one-sided relationship. In general the creators working under that system were unable to be as creative as they liked or they had no incentive to be. That's why young cartoonists flocked to this alternative system. Not only did it allow complete and full freedom



Script: DAVE SCHREINER

Art: DENIS KITCHEN

Continued on page 42

By George W.
Claxton III

Who would have believed that in the last portion of the 20th century it would be possible for an American to be arrested for his thoughts. Yet that is exactly what happened to a young comic book artist from Florida.

Michael Diana, creator of the underground 'zine *Boiled Angel* was convicted of distributing obscenity in 1995 by a Superior Court jury in Florida.

According to the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, a Florida state appeals court later upheld the conviction making Diana the only American artist ever convicted of obscenity.

"He was given a \$3,000 fine and ordered to have contact with no one under the age of 18. He has to do 1,284 hours of community service, enroll in a journalistic ethics course and he was sentenced to 3 years probation," said Chris Bleistein, executive director of the CBLDF.

"They allowed the police to come into his house anytime they wanted, without a warrant, to inspect the house and see if he had or was creating any obscene material," Bleistein said.

According to the CBLDF, Diana's attorney, Luke Lirot, considers this a seminal case because it was the first time that an artist had been punished for ideas and images that came solely from his own imagination.

"This case is important because it will have a dramatic effect on the concept of artistic freedom in our society," he said.

Bleistein said that with the help of the defense fund Diana tried to have his case heard by the Supreme Court, but the high court turned down his appeal.

"We just lost that one," he said.

However, the CBLDF has had other victories, according to Bleistein, one of which was against the California tax

FREEDOM IS NEVER FREE OF THE PERILS OF BEING AN ARTIST IN THE BIBLE BELT



equalization board.

"Paul Mavrides, he was an underground artist in the '60s, one of the co-creators of the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers. He got a letter from the California Board of Equalization saying that he owed thousands of dollars in back taxes," Bleistein said.

According to Bleistein the board of equalization had come to the conclusion that Mavrides' work, as camera-ready art, was more akin to the work of a commercial artist than that of a painter or sculptor and was therefore subject to the state commercial tax.

"They wanted him to pay back taxes on everything he had ever created," Bleistein said.

Bleistein believes that the tax board chose Mavrides because they thought he would be unable to defend himself.

"They didn't realize that there was a Comic Book Legal Defense Fund," he said.

The CBLDF, according to Bleistein, exists solely to defend the constitutional rights of comic creators, readers and purveyors.

"We are a non profit organization dedicated to defending the First Amendment rights of the comics community," he said.

The First Amendment, for those of you who may not remember it,

states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for the redress of grievances."

The Supreme Court has in the past largely interpreted the First Amendment as giving the widest latitude to speech assuming that people would be able to make their own decisions as to what they should read or think based on what was available in the open "marketplace of ideas."

According to Bleistein, however, there are many places in the country where the marketplace is allowed only a very limited selection.

"Most of our cases seem to come from the south," he said.

According to a spokesman at the CBLDF offices, more than half of all the cases they deal with come from what is often called the Bible Belt and all three of the guilty findings occurred in the south.

"Unfortunately it seems to be that way," he said.

On the up side, the CBLDF says that they have actually won the majority of the cases they've weighed in on, most without ever going to court.

"Usually a call from Burton Joseph, our legal counsel, is enough to make most chiefs of police or local prosecutors think that it would be more trouble than it's worth to prosecute," the spokesman said.

Michael Diana, who has now served out the term of his probation, moved to New York where he continues to work on his art.

Those interested in supporting the work of the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund can send donations to them at P.O. Box 693, Northampton, MA, 01061. You can also look up their web page on the Internet at www.CBLDF.org.



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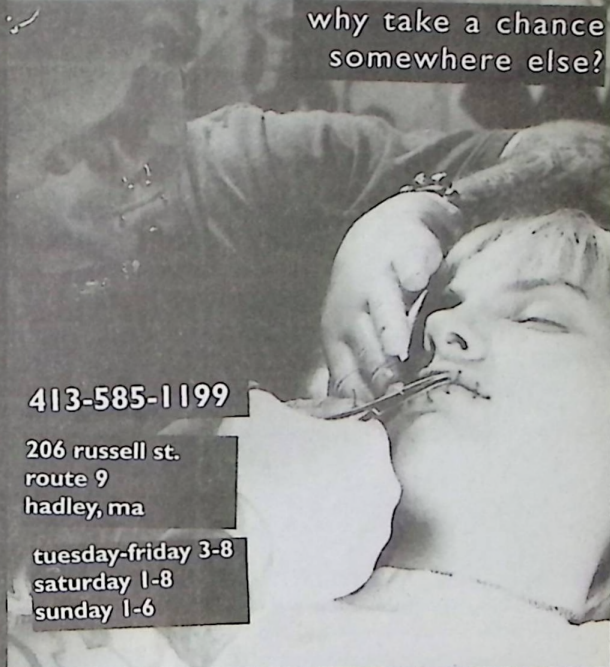
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MUSIC

by Phil Straub

If comic artwork be to your liking, then it can often be difficult to satisfy your craving. One avenue is to frequent comic stores, of course. Another is the gallery route. At last count, there were three museums in the US devoted to comic artwork and a handful of others devoted to specific artists. Many artists have aligned themselves with galleries and can often be found on display, whilst still other galleries in this country set aside a healthy portion of their schedules to focusing on comic artists. Still, if proximity is your great prohibitor, there's always newspapers ... although judging from this nation's dailies and more than a few weeklies, comics have lost their star status amongst the print media. Ah well. Ebbs and flows, I suppose.

No, your most consistently successful outlet is going to be music outlets. It's true. Artists have for years been well represented within the music industry and, on occasion, their work has even been able to define and determine the look and identity of a band. That, however, is not very common. What is common, though, is to see comic artwork being used to hawk some record, cd or tape. But don't take my word

FROM TOONS TO TUNES: Local Artists DO Discs

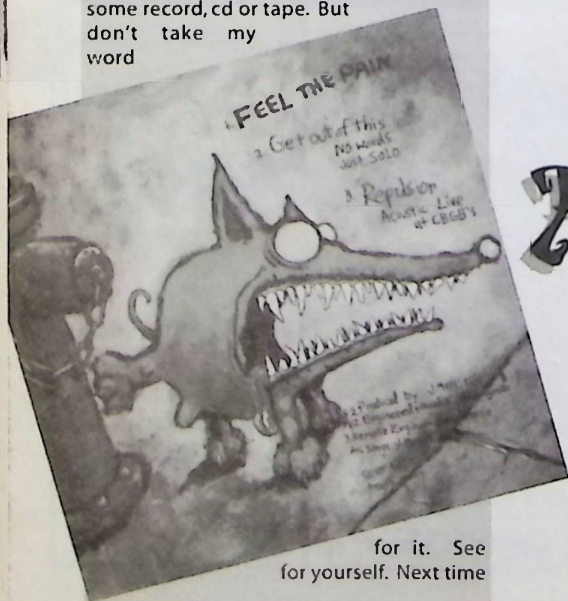
you're in a record store, see how much comic artwork pops into view. Here's a quick roundup of what you could find if you just limited yourself to the Pioneer Valley's finest.

Looking at the national front, there are two artists that come to mind. Angry Johnny's work can be found not just on the recordings of his successful punkabilly combo the Killbills, but on a few releases by Dinosaur Jr. as well. Johnny turned in six pieces of artwork, with the first two appearing on the *Start Choppin'* EP (1992, WB).



This EP featured a chop-happy chumpie on the front and a quite unhappy beastie sipping off a bottle of Quick Kill on the back. The full-length *Where You Been* (1993, Sire/WB) followed, utilizing two more "subdued" pieces. Finally, the last of his artwork was used for one of the next album's singles, *Feel The Pain* (1994, WB). This release contains the best of the lot: a fat, funky dog experiencing the relief that only a fire hydrant can provide. Front and back cover artwork for a national act? Not too shabby.

Neither, of course, is simply one, or the other. Case in point: the front cover of *Snarkism* (1996, Alternative Tentacles) by



for it. See for yourself. Next time

M

I

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Tribe 8. Diane Dimassa's artwork is a series of four panels featuring everyone's favorite Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist, Hothead Paisan, "practising" with the band. This tasty little vignette captures quite nicely the spirit and exuberance of the band, while at the same time staying consistent with what we've come to expect from Hothead... namely, chainsaw-induced castrations.

Speaking of chainsaws, the cover of *Fruit of the Doom* (1991), a cassette release by local legends Doom Nation, features a particularly nasty chainsaw-wielding banana prancing about a skull full of evil-looking fruit. This very crazy piece of not-so-still life can be attributed to Dan Berger, who can be found haunting the hallways of Mirage Studios when he's

DOOM NATION



FRUIT of the DOOM

ferent groups. The first, *Big Fish In A Little Sea* (1991, JAMA Disc), was an attempt to cash in on the Nation's growing fascination with the Pioneer Valley. The artwork was a collaboration between Talbot and Steve Lavigne, and is pretty enjoyable on its own. Eric's artwork can also be found on *Waterproof* (1993, Spin Art/JAMA Disc), local musician Zeke Fiddler's first record. The artwork refers to one of the songs of the record, *Buglamp*, although my favorite part of it is the guitar-playing Bug Creature on the back.

This bug beast can also be found on the cover of a compilation

which includes Mr. Fiddler. *Hotel Massachusetts* is a compilation of artists who Talbot managed to incorporate into the Bay State. This artwork shows a number of different comic characters (including Homer J. Simpson and Cobalt 60) hanging out in the front area of the

should probably know that it is Mr. Bode who's responsible for the amoeba-like squashed band shot that can be found underneath the CD.

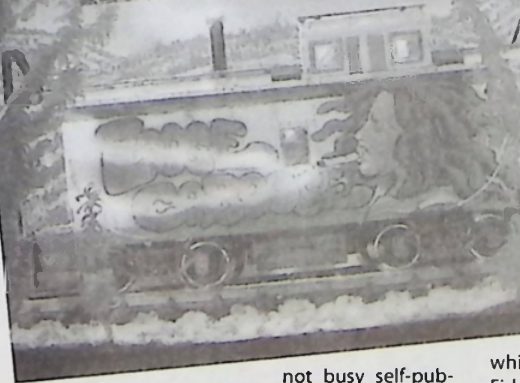
Eric Talbot (poster-boy for issue #1) can be linked to at least three releases from as many dif-

BIG FISH
IN A LITTLE SEA

Zeke Fiddler

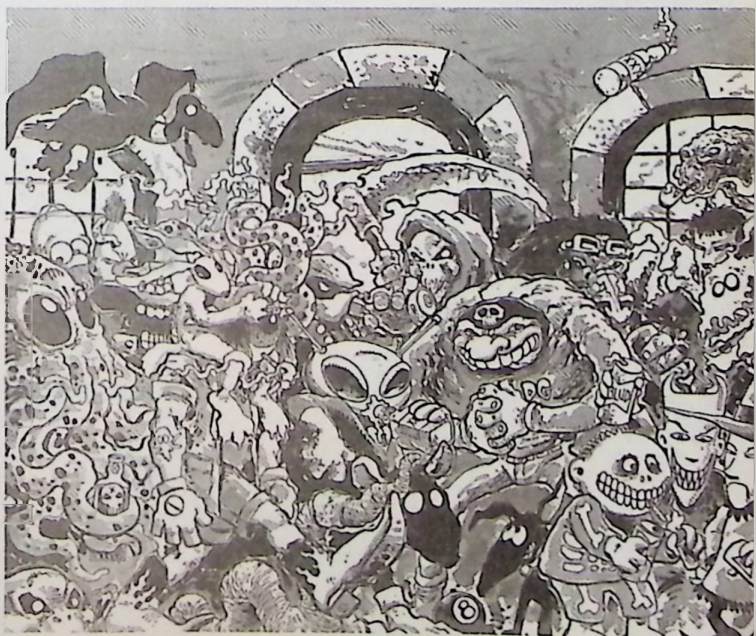
Waterproof

Hotel's Tap Room. Unfortunately, when the record went to press, whoever was in charge of layout botched the job, and the artwork came out as a muddy spludge of black ink. As a result, few have been exposed to this piece in all its glory. Until now that is. (Look below.)

CABOOSE
HA FE MOVE

not busy self-publishing his *Gutwallow* comic. (Special note goes to Steve Lavigne, who colored the work so that it would look more evil.)

And how stands our VMag favorites? Well, Mark Bode (test subject, issue #2) can boast of both covers of at least one release, that of Loose Caboose's *Caboose Ha Fe Move* (1995). The cover is a heavily graffitied train car (guess which one) sporting a head shot of Bob Marley experiencing a little "Rastaman Vibration." The back cover shows the other side of the train car as it passes through a swampy section of its route. Also, if you picked up Mark Hershler's *Out Of The Darkness* CD (1997, Lil Shack), then you



V
mag
COMICS
GROUP

#1
MARCH
1998

PHUNK POWER COMIX

DID I EVER TELL
YOU ABOUT THE THIRD
TIME I ROSE FROM
THE DEAD?

'SCUSE ME, PAL,
I GOTTA GO, AH...
CHECK A KEG...

JEEZ, I'M GOIN' BACK
TA WOIKIN' DAYS...
LESS FREAKS.

NOT IN THIS ISSUE
J. O' BARFLY'S
the
CRAW

HADLEY MAN SEZ:

PICTURES FUNNY...
BUT ME NO LIKE
PINK PAPER!

NO LIKE!!!

VMAg

PHUNK POWER COMIX/ March 1998

IFC ... MAGIC BOY WRITES HIS CONGRESSMAN
James Kochalka

3 ... LUCE CANNON
Lucy Hicks

4 ... SHOWDOWN IN THE SHIMMERING ZONE!
Alan Moore, Steve Bissette
John Totleben, Don Simpson

10 ... HELP WANTED
Renrut

11 ... TV ADDICTS
Aleksandar Zograf

12 ... MONTGOMERY WART
Mark Martin

12 ... LEOLD
Roger & Salem Saloom

12 ... REAR DIFFERENTIAL
Mediocre Concepts Unlimited

13 ... SLIP AND SMITTY
Brian Kirk

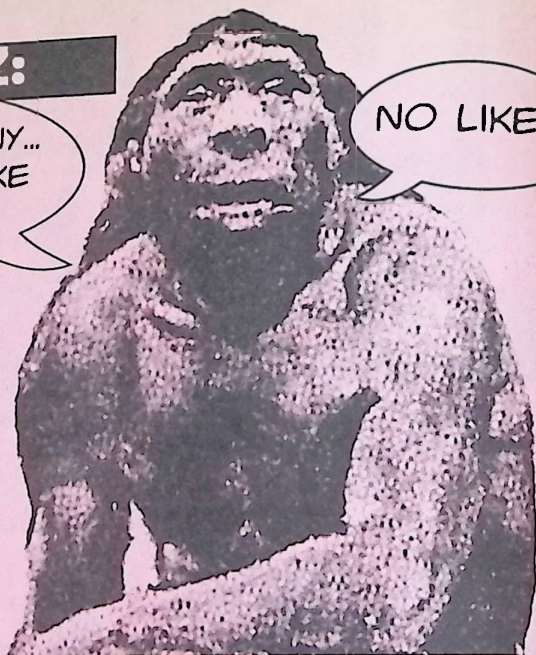
14 ... WAL-MART: FIRST AMENDMENT...
Daphne Hoey

IBC ... LIFE ON MARS: CHAPTER 5
Matt Mitchell

THE CRAW cover by Jim Lawson & Murphy & Rob.

Special thanks to Alan Moore, Steve Bissette and John Totleben for their gentlemanly kindness in giving us permission to reprint their *N-Man* "ashcan edition" comic. For one of the best reads of the past ten years, check out their work (along with Roarin' Rick Veitch) on the 1963 comics series published by Image Comics. Likewise with Alan and Rick's *Supreme* title from Awesome Comics.

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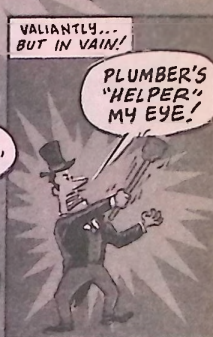
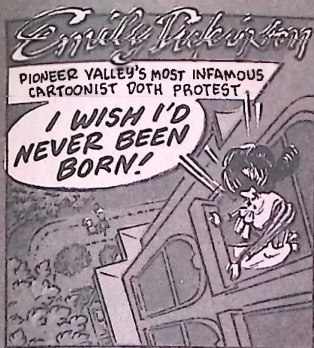
MAGIC BOY WRITES HIS CONGRESSMAN

©1997 by JAMES KOCHALKA

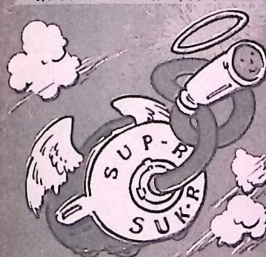


LUCE CANNON

©98
LUCY
HICKS



IF ONLY MY PARENTS HAD LIVED
IN MORE ENLIGHTENED TIMES



THE THING THAT IS ME
COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED

IN CASE YOU'RE NOT SICK OF HEARING
WHY I TURNED OUT TO BE SUCH A
MISERABLE PISSANT...

MY MOTHER, THE FOOL, ACTUALLY
TOOK A RELISH TO COMIC BOOKS!
SHE EVEN SUBSCRIBED TO SOME
JEJUNE FANCY THAT COMICS ARE
ART! AND SHE THEIR PATRON.



ONE DAY, MY MOM HAD THE
"FORTUNE" TO MEET CHARLES
DICKENS, CREATOR OF THE
SCANDALOUS "BOILED ANGEL"
COMIC. HE WAS HAWKING
HIS WARE AT A MUSEUM
IN NORTHAMPTON, A TOWN
NEAR MY HOMETOWN



THE REPTILE INVITED HER TO
LOOK AT HIS ETCHINGS. IN
SCANT MINUTES, HIS COLORS
WERE IN FULL BLOOM

MADAME, THERE MAY
NEVER BE ANOTHER "BOILED
ANGEL" THE SAD TRUTH IS
I'M UNINSPIRED!!



NINE MONTHS LATER...

WHAT EVER SHALL
WE DO WITH THE
THING?

I'M SURE I
HAVE NO IDEA!
I SUPPOSE WE SHOULD
BUY IT SOME PENS
OR SOMETHING



I LIVED LIFE IN SECLUSION
HAVING NO TASTE FOR WHAT I
DID, YET UNABLE TO DO ANY-
THING BUT DRAW COMICS.
IT'S IN MY BLOOD!

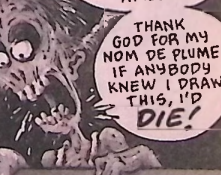


FINALLY, MY SWEET MERCIFUL
MORTALITY EMBRACED ME.
BUT THIS SEPTIC CARTOONIST
BLOOD WILL NOT BE DENIED!
EVEN IN DEATH, I MUST DRAW
COMICS... ETERNALLY!

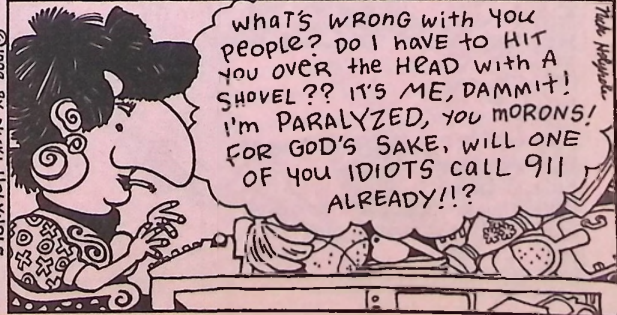


"THAT'S NOT TERRIBLE"
YOU SAY? "CRYBABY!"
YOU
YOU
YOU SAY??

JUST LOOK
AT THIS TWADDLE
I AM DOOMED TO
CREATE AGAIN AND
AGAIN FOREVER
AMEN



Stiff by Nicki Holyhole



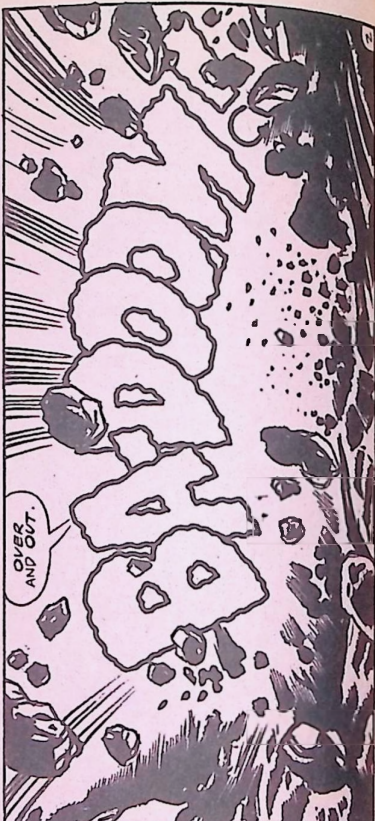
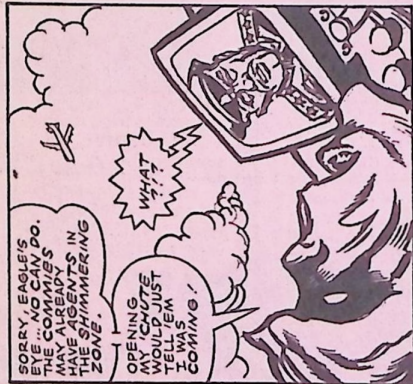
THE UNBELIEVABLE MANNING FACES A

"SHOOWDOWN
SHIMMERING
ZONE!"

EAGLE'S-EYE,
YOU'RE RIGHT ABOVE
THE OUTSKIRTS
OF THE ULTRA-
ZONE WE DETECTED
HERE IN YUCCA
FLATS!

OPEN
YOUR
EYES
BEFORE
IT'S TOO
LATE!

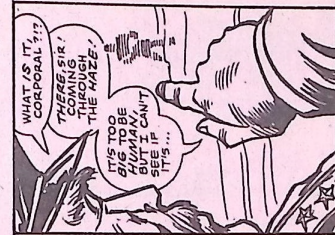
RUE TING, ARTING PULSE-POUNCE, INKS IRIDESCENT, INKS LITTING, LETTERING
ALAN MOORE, JOHN MOORE, STEVE BISSETTE, JOHN MOORE, DON SIMPSON











"HELP WANTED" ©Renrut 1998



Stamp of Truth

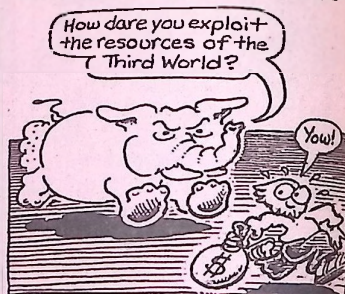
It's tough trying to make a living in Asia.



Exporting gems is a little risky.



Success is risky too!



Some westerners resort to begging.



Others, more noble souls, make themselves indispensable.



I was less than noble, so, I tried to sell my cartoons.



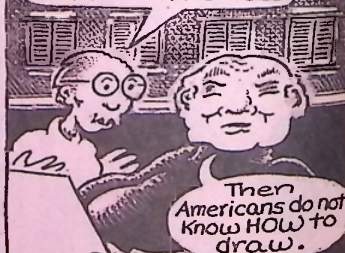
Shankar had his own building in New Delhi.



He studied my stuff for a while.



But that's how we DRAW in America.



Let me show you my GREATEST accomplishment.



No! The International Doll Museum! Dolls from Angola to Zanzibar. Very nice.



Give up cartooning, dear boy. Go home, find a little wife, play house...



Help Wanted! Cartoonist needs assistant. Must draw fingers, not balloons.

WE ARE THE BEST, AND WE
KNOW HOW TO FIGHT FOR
OUR POSITIONS!!

by ALEKSANDAR ZOGRAFI

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THE BEST INFORMATION
AVAILABLE!**

OH, YEAH? THAT IS
WHAT I HEAR ALL
THE TIME... YOU ARE
THE BEST, MOST
WONDERFUL AND ALL
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YOU ARE: PATHETIC,
BOASTFUL MORONS!

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LIKE A MAN!

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BUY OUR PRO-DUCTS !!
TRA-LA-LA

YOU...
STUPID CONSUMER

SO, WHAT
DO YOU SAY
ABOUT IT, 3

I'VE SEEN FEW MORE
HONG-KONG ACTION
MOVIES THAN YOU
DID, YOU FOOL!

HAÏ!

MONTGOMERY WART

AWRITE! IT'S GREAT TA SEE THE PRESS IS SUPPORTIN' THE ARTS AN' GIVIN' OUT MONEY TA GREEDY LITTLE BASTARDS LIKE ME!



WHEN I WIN ME THAT PRIZE I'M GONNA GIT ME A REAL WOODBURNIN' SET! - BUT 'TIL THEN I'LL JUS' HAFTA KEEP STEALIN' GRAMPAW'S CEEGARS AN' WOODEN LEGS!



BLEEUULK!! MAN, THEM CEEGARS IS RAUNCHY! BUT AT LEAST I GOT A GOOD LIKENESS O' THE EDITOR O' THAT OL' NEWSPAPER! I'LL WIN THAT PRIZE FER SURE!



HOWEVER...

LOOKIT THAT UNHOLY MESS! SUSIE CHAPSTICH DRAWS LIKE A BRAIN-DEAD MONKEY! HOW COME SHE WON THAT PRIZE 'STEADA ME?!!



IT AIN'T YER ARTWORK, MONTGOMERY, IT'S YER MEDIUM! YOU DREW ON YER GRAMPAW'S WOODEN LEG WITH A CEEGAR AN' I DREW ON MY MOMMA'S PANTIES WITH LIPSTICK!



DANG MY LUCK! MY MOMMA DON'T WEAR PANTIES!!



MARK MARTIN © 95

COMIX

C97-016 ex-girlfriend
SyndicateEast, 800.723.9948

Leold www.leold.com
by Roger and Salem Salloom © 1997

Life is totally tough.
It's a bear.

I meet my ex-girlfriend and she says, "How are you?"

I say, "Fine." Actually, I felt so nervous and upset to see her that "Fine" described the tiny particles my brain had broken into when I saw her.

She was standing there looking fragile, lovely, hair by Warner Bros., lips by Renoir, and gentle vocals by Lee Remick.

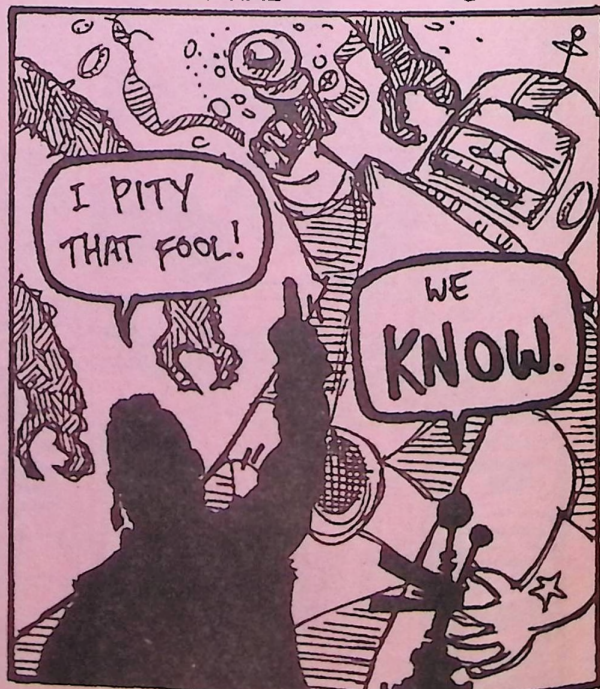
I said, "How are you?" She started to cry.

That made me feel much better.



REAR DIFFERENTIAL

© mclU

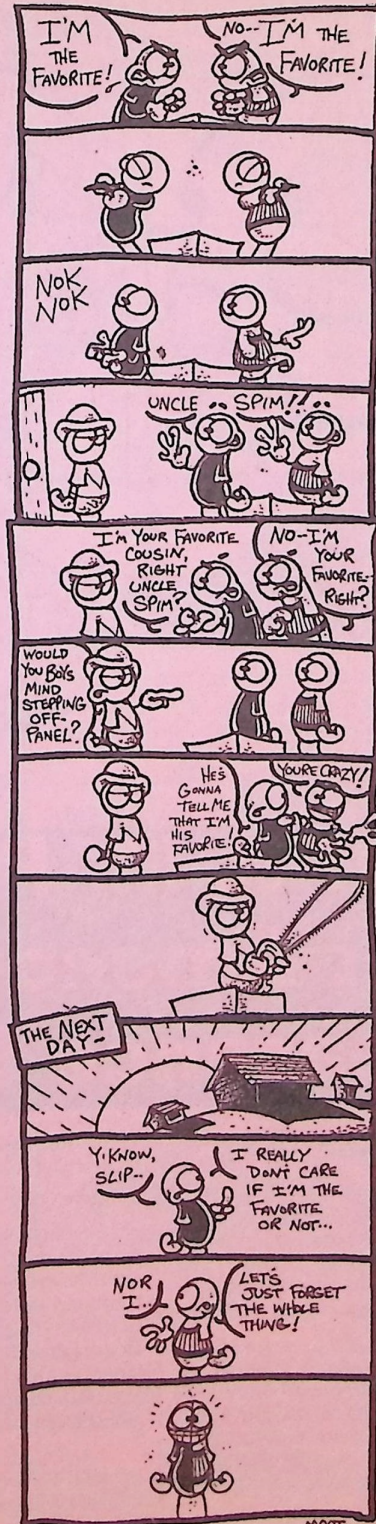


Mr. T Science Theatre 3000

MOOT COMICS
PRESENTS

SLIP AND SPMITTY

by BRIAN
KIRK
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Comix



dan berger's
gutwallow
the gingerbread man



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<http://www.gutwallow.com>

comix

WAL-MART: First Amendment Clearance Sale

by Daphne Hoey

This past November 2, Mike Sangiacomo reported in his syndicated comics column that Marvel Comics was cutting a deal to put its comics into all Wal-Mart stores.

Wal-Mart had earlier banned all comics from its stores due to one Image Comic that depicted a severed head. Yeah, one panel from one comic led the national chain to stop carrying all comics. That's power, sweetie.

So, how is it that Marvel is about to

get its titles back into Wal-Mart? Simple: By agreeing to self-censor its own books.

Here's how:

Excessive violence is out. All references to Satan, hell, devils and demons — out (Marvel has since shelved the about-to-ship series *Satana*, and has recently canceled the long-running *Ghost Rider* title and the short-lived *Werewolf By Night* [the latter written by Northampton's Paul Jenkins]). Suggestive sexual situations (let alone nudity) are out.

in fact, any sexuality, when referred to, will be hetero. Marvel VP Shirrel Rhoads says that homosexuality is out (no

ironic pun intended). "At least we won't be exploring it in any stories," says Rhoads.

Rhoads said getting into Wal-Mart would give Marvel that valuable chunk of the market most comics publishers are currently lacking — kids. The fact that Marvel has been hurting so bad financially has a lot to do with it too.

Wal-Mart is pulling the same shtick on Marvel that it pulled on the music industry — by refusing to carry those items it deems inappropriate to children. Which, I suppose, is their prerogative. And likewise for Marvel by choosing to submit.

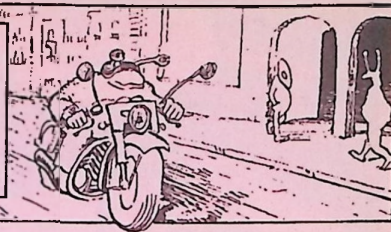
These are the realities of the marketplace.

But, as Sangiacomo, writes, "Marvel can have it both ways with careful planning. Set aside a score of G-rated comics for Wal-Mart, but leave the rest of the line alone."

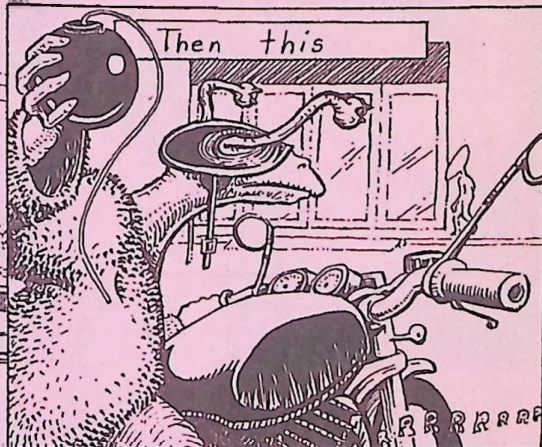
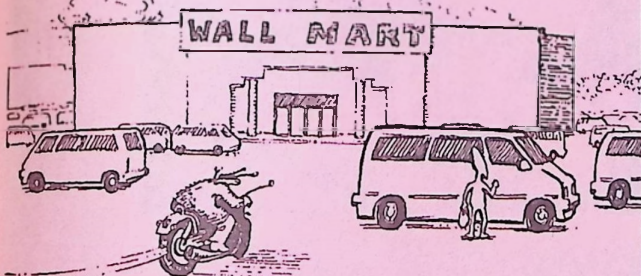
Time will tell.

LIFE ON MARS
Usually Takes Up This Space...

So I guess we'll say this action happens on the red planet—maybe near the town with all the beautiful balconies featured in that last installment...



But, in truth, because of recent events, I really just want to draw this

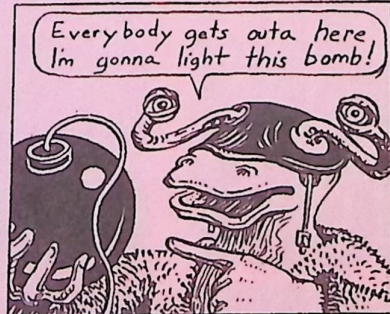


Then this

Then let things take their natural course



Evacuate the store, you! and use that intercom!



Everybody gets outa here I'm gonna light this bomb!

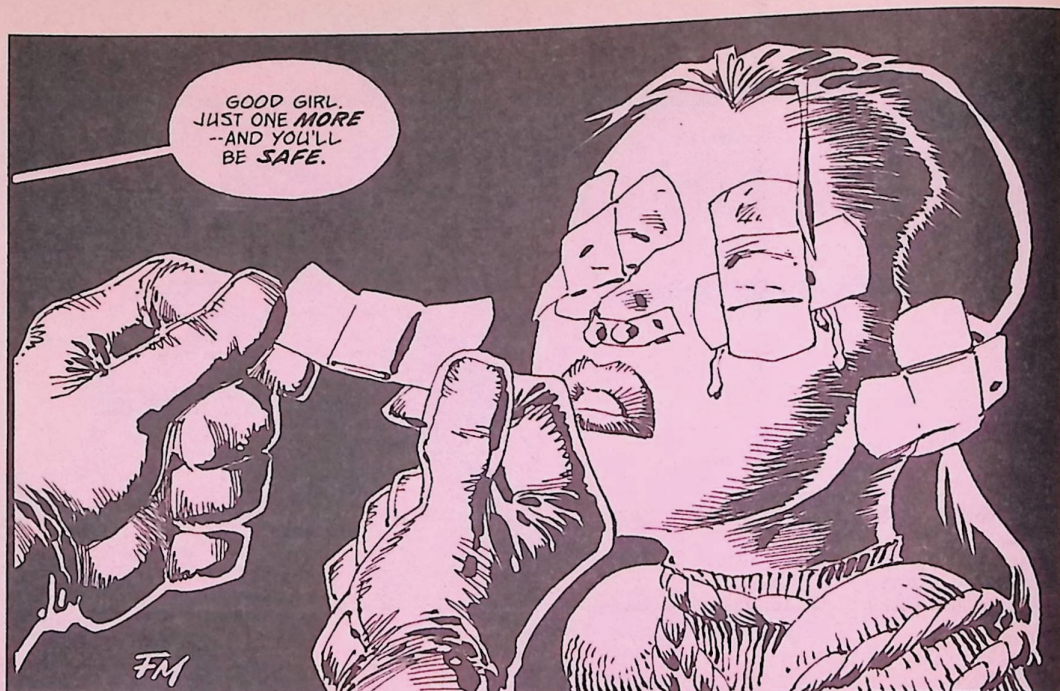


But it's too bad our anti-chain hero is destined to lead a tragic life. For, as we know, out of the wreckage



another chain will soon grow. This is the only way the land will ever be used - it has been written in stone. This is just the way the town is zoned.





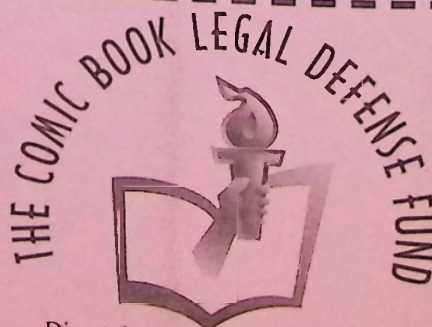
FIGHT CENSORSHIP! FIGHT CENSORSHIP! FIGHT CENSORSHIP! FIGHT CENSORSHIP!

(copy and mail)

The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization dedicated to defending First Amendment rights in the comics community. If you are against censorship, say so by sending your individual expression of Freedom of Speech in "dollars" to the C.B.L.D.F. Tell them: "Frank Miller made me do it!"

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familiarity with traditional folk music. The album features a multitude of instrumental combinations anchored by Robinson's acoustic guitar work.

While the music is consistent with folk themes and rhythms it offers very little in the way of inventiveness. Robinson's vocals are eerily similar to that of Cat Stevens as is his lyrical cadence. His interpretation of the classic folk format is not without recognizable strengths though. A high degree of musicianship is evident in Robinson's guitar work. It is no wonder he has earned significant acclaim on the folk circuit.

It is outside of the ready-made folk fan, however, where Robinson fails to deliver. Robinson does not stretch his music beyond very patterned formats. The 11 songs on the CD are melancholy ballads strummed on an acoustic guitar often backed by a host of other instruments including mandolin, fiddle, banjo, and accordion. While there is diversity in instrumentation there is very little variation in their presentation.

Undoubtedly, his music would make for excellent background noise while consuming a Sunday morning coffee. However, the similarity to the tried and true is somewhat distracting.

- Dave Burruto



FRANK MANZI Going Home

(Poor Rider)

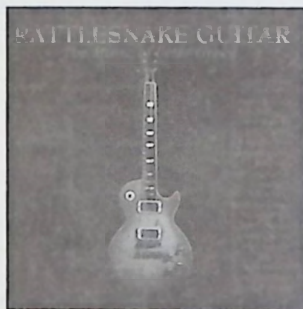
Frank Manzi is probably one of the better-known products of the Valley. He is a fixture in the Northeast, bringing his folk and rock blend to audiences for nearly two decades. Manzi has just released a new CD entitled *Going Home*.

The 11-song disc is representative of Manzi's folk n' roll writing style familiar to his fans. His voice is Dylanesque, minus the years of cigarettes, and his guitar and harmonica tandem reflect an unmistakable leaning towards all things Mellen-camp.

His songs are up-tempo folk tunes with a strong beat drawing from classic rock n' roll. Other songs however, such as the ninth song on the album, entitled "Ribbons, Bows, and Arrows," at times resemble old Billy Joel ballads.

While Frank Manzi's veteran wiles come through on the album some songs fall short. The CD is a mixed bag of admirable rock tunes with a few avoidables.

- Dave Burruto



VARIOUS ARTISTS Rattlesnake Guitar

(Viceroy)

The only guitarist who ever made me sweat" was how blues legend B.B. King once described Peter Green. For those who are unfamiliar with Green, he was the innovative leader of Fleetwood Mac when it was a blues rock outfit in the late sixties. He's probably remembered mostly for writing "Black Magic Woman" which was a huge hit for Santana when they covered it a year or so after the original was released.

Produced by Cream lyricist Pete Brown, *Rattlesnake Guitar* is a double CD that actually does justice to this music giant. And when I say "various artists," well, you've never seen such a lineup. I couldn't name them all, but it's a veritable *Who's Who* of luminaries from the great period of British blues, and a few Yanks as well. Even Arthur Brown (he of the "Crazy World" fame) is here with an excellent rendition of "Green Manilishi." Clocking out at just over five minutes, not quite as long as the marathon original but quite rousing none the less. Rory Gallagher is here (on mandolin, no less) with a bone-chilling "Leavin' Town Blues." From Jethro Tull, Ian Anderson and original guitarist Mick Abrams each make an appearance and members of Savoy Brown, Jeff Beck Group, Colloseum, and other seminal acts from that era are all on hand. Even pioneer Zoot Money shows up for "Watcha Gonna Do." Artists from this side of the ocean include Southside Johnny, Billy Sheehan, Harvey Brooks, and Harvey Mandell. The Uptown Horns provide an enjoyable version of "Baby When The Sun Goes Down."

The last decade has made the "tribute" album a major staple in the industry and *Rattlesnake Guitar* is an outstanding example of why this is. This is an essential disc for blues fans or lovers of any music played with conviction and expertise, and hopefully will rekindle interest in the music of this largely overlooked genius.

- Meathook Williams



CHRIS DUARTE Tailspin Headwhack

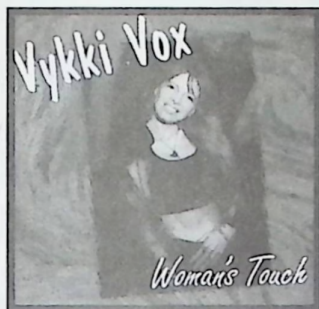
(Silvertone)

This guy owes a heck of a lot to Jimi Hendrix and even more so to Stevie Ray Vaughn's take on Hendrix. But, hey, you could have worse influences...right? On his second recording, *Tailspin Headwhack* (what a great name), Chris Duarte plays some incendiary and inspired stuff. On his first release, Austin, Texas native Duarte managed to meld Stevie Ray and the Red Hot Chili Peppers into a great, funky album. Though generally danceable this one's not quite as funky up, opting for a more soul-searching, brooding sound. It comes off quite well indeed, and I think this one's better.

The poppish "Cleopatra" leads off with distortion-laden guitar over a nice groove. Chris does the lead vocals here as well and his voice matches his music perfectly. At this point the show starts to ignite. There's a soulful rendition of B.B. King's "The Thrill Is Gone" and an excellent update of the Meters' "People Say." The rest are mostly originals and run from the rockin' "Drivin' South" to the more introspective and psychedelic sounding "Walls." Also noteworthy is the title cut which also sounds like something from the "Electric Ladyland" sessions. Ditto for the sultry ".32 Blues," with superlative Hammond work from former SRV bandmate Reese Winans. The band is always right on the mark, confident and firm.

A solid offering, *Tailspin Headwhack* is an easy disc to throw on almost anytime and I can't think how anybody couldn't get caught up in this swamp-rocker groove.

- Meathook Williams



VYKKI VOX Woman's Touch

(Webrock)

This EP (five songs) by local singer Vykkki Vox is funky, catchy and generally successful. Ms. Vox has a good set of pipes and the songs are thoughtfully written and played with tasteful understatement. The title song kicks off the disc and features Bob Greco's fine slide guitar reminding me a bit of Bonnie Raitt or Lowell George. Vox along with keyboardist David Osof wrote and produced all the songs here. They make a good team. Osof's a true triple threat, playing Hammond organ, piano and clavinet (the latter to great effect in "On The Run," my favorite.) "Never Enough" begins with honky-tonk piano and allows Vox to really stretch out some. It also adds a horn section that pulls off a dynamite, cascading run at one point. Up next is "Undercover," a sultry, smoky, torch song with lots of Hammond played quite inventively at times. Towards the end of this song, Vykkki pushes the envelope with some classy, heartfelt blues. She really does have a nice voice. "Alone" is the only one here that I didn't feel strongly about.

All in all, this Boston-area band has what it takes, and reminds us that this area continues to breed blues and soul musicians every bit as notable as those from any other part of the country.

- Meathook Williams

WILL OLDHAM Joya

(Drag City)

Once there was an urgency and immediacy to Will Oldham's dark balladry that gave brilliant albums like *Viva Last Blues* and *Days in the Wake* emotional impact of a frighteningly personal nature. Filled with song writing of heartfelt sorrow and harrowing anguish streaked with an inky-

black sense of humor, Oldham's band, Palace, strung together a run of excellent albums. But now after stripping the Palace moniker favoring consideration as a solo entity, much of Oldham's current release also feels stripped of any of his earlier potency. There are some fragments and flashes of greatness to be found, but mostly Joya is sadly uninspired.

Maybe it's too much of a good thing... or too much of the same thing. Right out of the gate, Joya feels like a stale rehash leading of two mid-tempo rockers "O Let It Be" and "Antagonism," both sounding like cleaned-up reworkings of material from Palace's last; the rough-hewn *Arise Therefore*. In the past, Oldham's song writing has been at it's best with his fractured love songs (*Viva's* "New Partner" or the single, "Little Blue Eyes"); here the tepid affair of "Open Your Heart" is not only lazy in vocal delivery, but also in writing ("Open your heart/Let this snake in/Don't fall apart..." [yawn]). Even the instantly recognizable nervous and broken warble seems missing from his voice: in it's place, a rather bland

version of it's former glorious weirdness.

The second half of the record is more enjoyable, but still disappointing considering Oldham's proven capabilities. "Be Still and Know God," with it's playfully giddy organ and catchy chorus, shows his writing taking an interesting poppy side step. While "Bolden Boke Boy," a tale of camouflaged meaning is classic cynical Oldham, as is the closer "Idea and Deed." On earlier releases, however these tracks would have paled next to the other stronger leaner material.

Hopefully, Joya is simply a miscalculation. Let's give Oldham the benefit of the doubt and chalk it up as being a "difficult transitional work." He remains one of America's most intriguing singer/songwriters and a solid bet to be of influence far into the future, but even the best sometimes spit out a dud.

- Stuart Bloomfield



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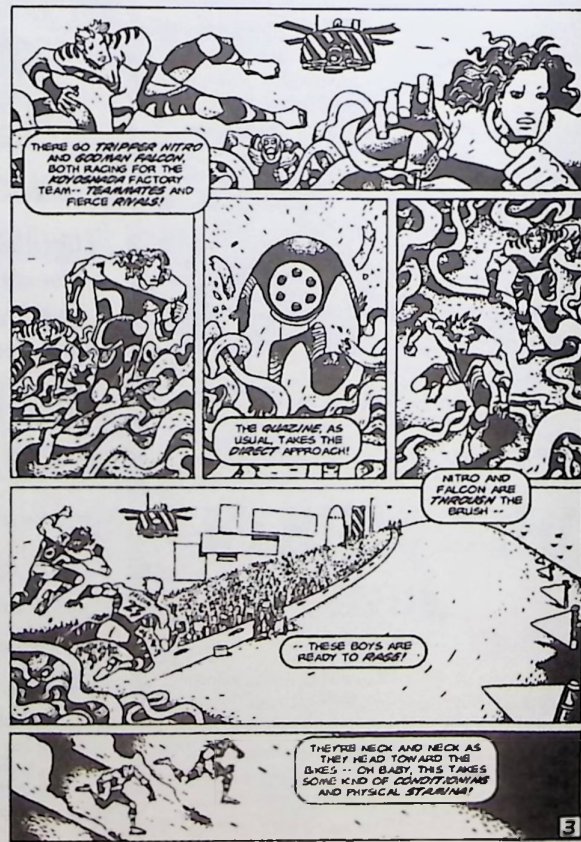


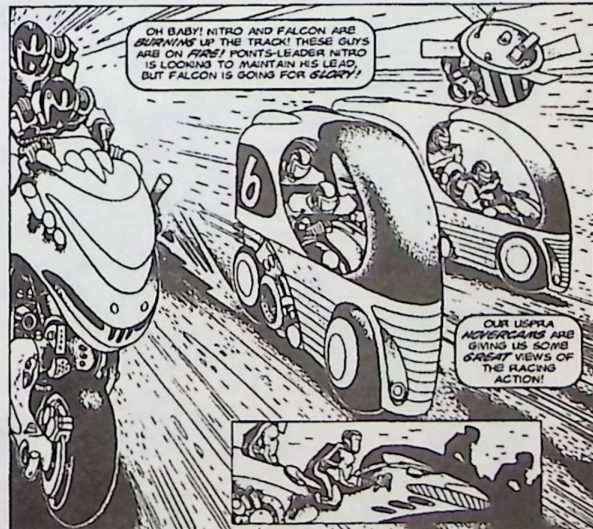
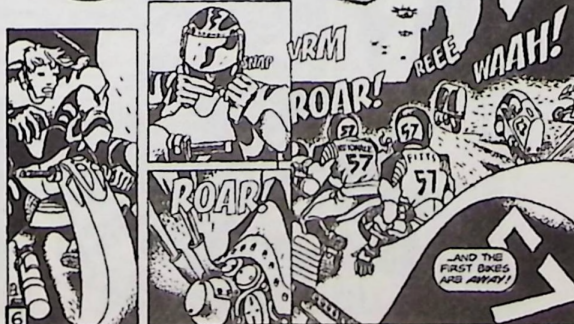
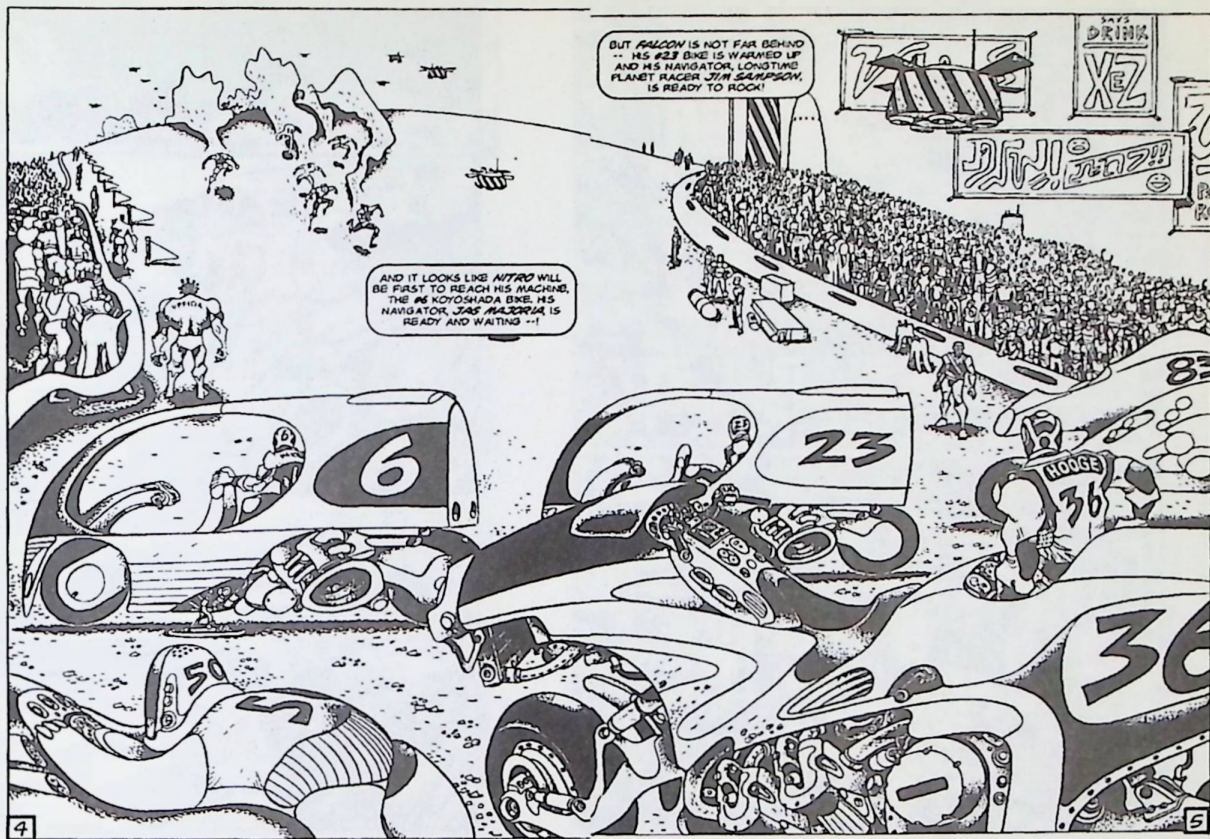
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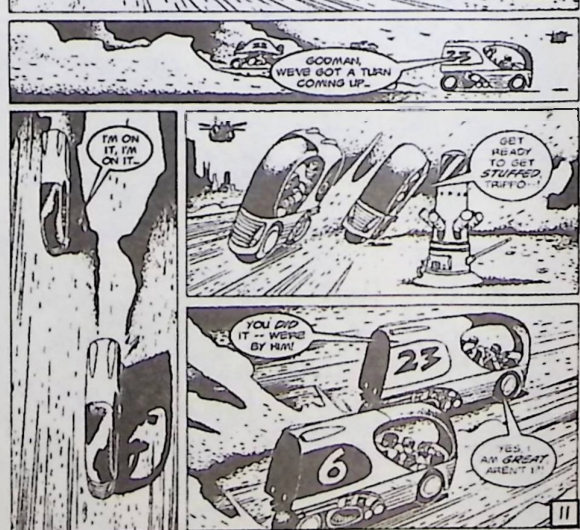
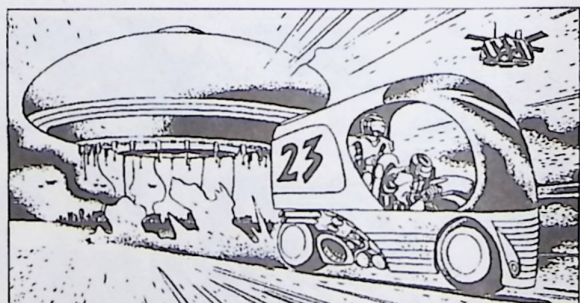
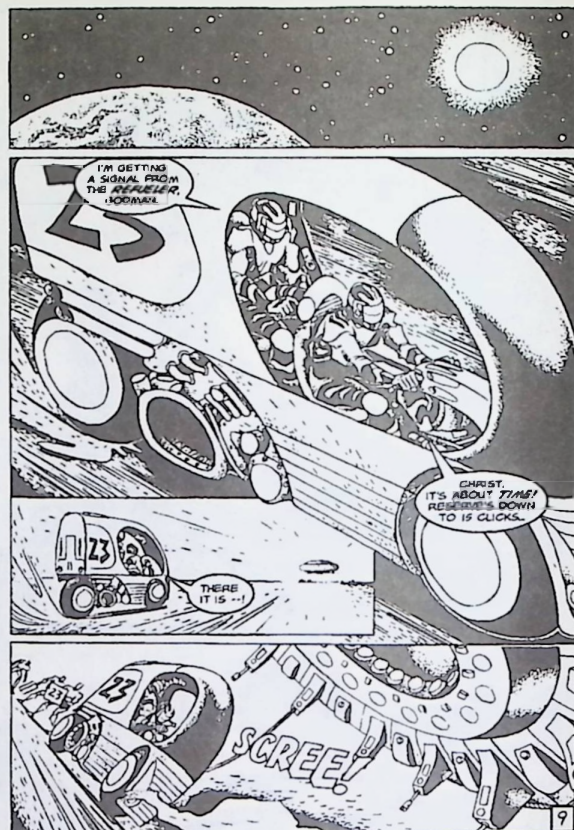
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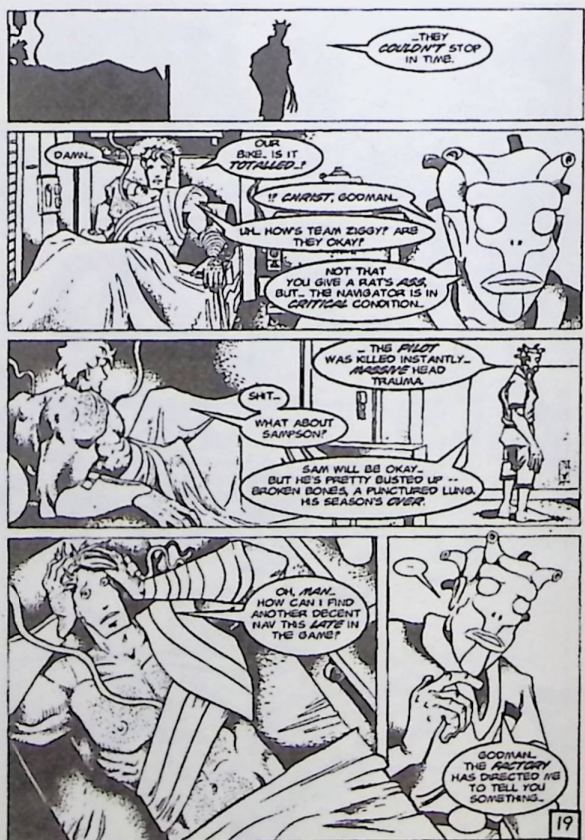
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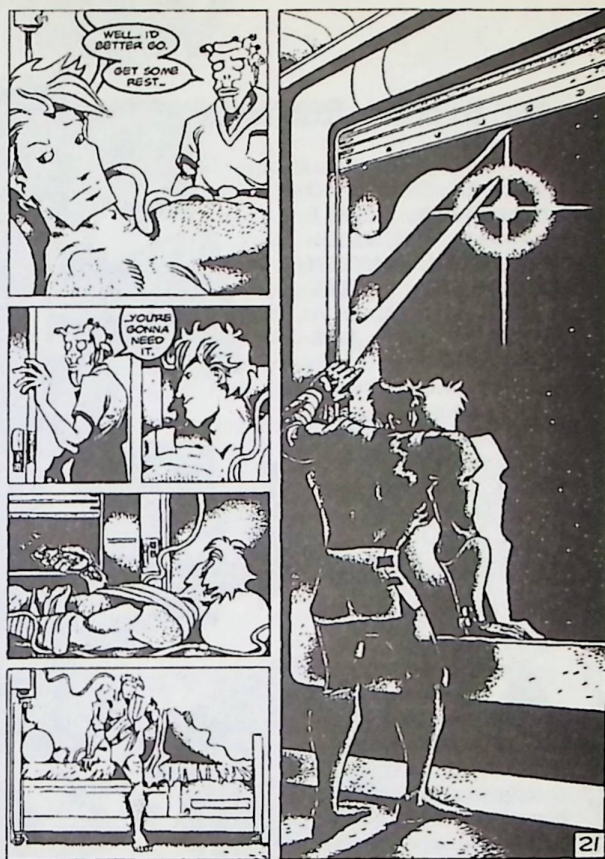
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by Brooks Robards

WHEN IT COMES TO ANIMATION, DELICIOUSLY SUBVERSIVE, FULL-LENGTH CARTOONS LIKE RALPH BAKSHI'S *Fritz the Cat* ARE RARITIES. The only real innovation arrives locally in the cartoon shorts of the annual International Festival of Animation. For feature-length animation, Disney-style cartoons are, regrettably, the main game in town.

Anastasia, the latest animated extravaganza for kids, may have been produced by Fox, but it's a Disney clone through and through. Lead director Don Bluth is a graduate of Uncle Walt's factory. After Disney, he went on to create *The Secret of NIMH*, *An American Tail* and *The Land Before Time* for Spielberg, Lucas and others. His collaborations with Gary Goldman include *Thumbelina*, as well as *Anastasia*.

In this animated version of the Russian monarchy's collapse, Gramma Romanov narrates with a bogus accent. Before you know it, a roguish monk named Rasputin precipitates the destruction of the czar and his family. Poor granddaughter Anastasia, the one survivor, is out on her ear with a bad case of amnesia. Ingrid Bergman won an Oscar in 1957 for her portrayal of the same role in the same story, since proven by DNA testing to have no basis in historical fact. In the cartoon version of *Anastasia*, a chorus line of plump proles sing and dance away in a grim, gray factory to let us know the Commies are in power. Anastasia, renamed Anya and outfitted with a pert Meg Ryan voice, is one good-looking celluloid nymphet. She's got a strong handshake, and she's certainly no shrinking violet. Something's missing in her life, though.

Anya/Anastasia needs to discover who she really is. Raised as an orphan, she wants to find her family. Along comes hand-

some con artist Dmitri, given voice by John Cusak doing a Leonardo diCaprio imitation. Dmitri plans to collect a reward from Gramma Romanov, now esconced in luxurious Parisian exile, by manufacturing her missing

granddaughter Anastasia out of the most likely look-alike. What luck that Anya happens to be the real thing. Put the two young people together, and you've got the beginnings of the perfect Disney formula: boy meets girl, and that takes care of everything. After all, doesn't every lonely girl like to think she's a princess? Isn't every little girl's fantasy to live happily ever after with her prince? Think about the public outpouring of grief over British Princess Diana's death for answers to those questions. In *Anastasia*, you get to have all your dreams come true.

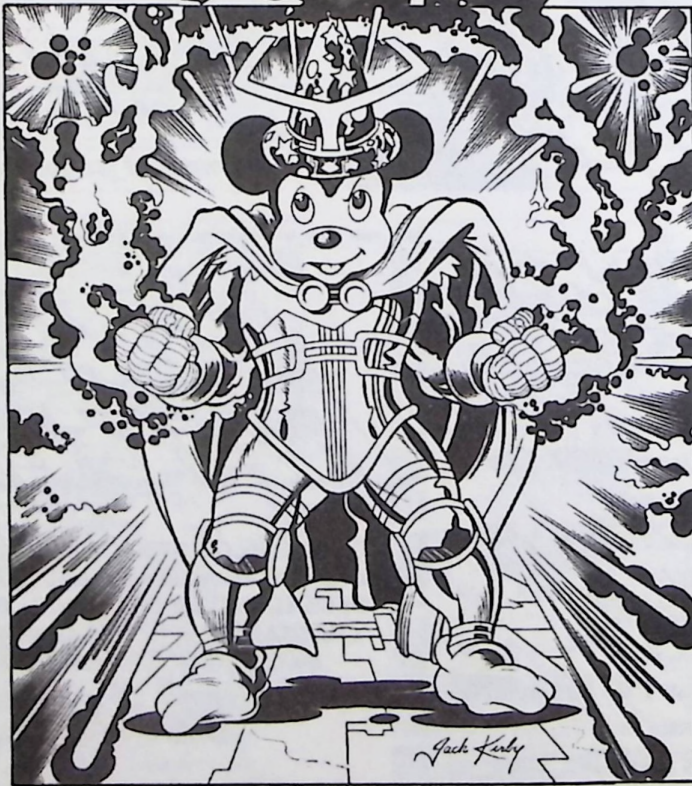
Even though he's dead, Rasputin conveniently reappears, rattling spare body parts and colluding with a bat who talks with a Minnesota accent. We all know the villain's plotting will come to naught, so we enjoy being scared. Before the young couple is united, though, there's a perilous boat trip to Paris, rejection by Gramma and a few other fillips to keep us entertained while the animators dazzle us with their talent.

Movie titles — even studios — may change, but the recipe doesn't. Take one attractive-but-lost hero or heroine, add a

few colorful adventures and a wicked but impotent villain. Mix generously with cuddly animals or animated chatchkes — whether teapots or gargoyles — for comic relief. Place in an environment that's animator heaven: a jungle, an ocean, Colonial America, classical Greece, Notre Dame Cathedral or Russia and Paris. Sprinkle with song and dance, then bake for 90 minutes. Finish with a happy ending.

Make no mistake about it. Disney controls the market, and their geese consistently lay golden eggs. Four years ago, Disney's

DOWN WITH DISNEY-STYLE CARTOONS



32nd animated feature film *The Lion King*, the first without human characters and first to be based on an original story, became the company's highest-grossing film in history. *Hercules* racked up \$180 million by the end of 1997. In mid-December, Fox's Disney-clone *Anastasia* had been a top-ten grosser for five weeks, amassing \$42 million. Disney alum Frederik du Chau's *Quest for Camelot*, due out this summer, promises to fill the Warner Bros. coffers.

So what's the beef? First let's tick off reasons Disney-style cartoons suck us in. Shouldn't parents feel safe letting their kids — as well as their own inner child — enjoy these seamless fantasies? Aren't cartoons supposed to be care-free, light, funny? Their roots lie in symbolic and caricatured simplifications of the world that are supposed to be particularly suitable for kids. So what if the bite of satire and political commentary of a Daumier, one of the granddaddies of the comic strip, is missing.

Disney-style cartoons have done the movie industry a favor by keeping alive the tradition of song and dance that goes back to the roots of comedy.

Outside of feature-length cartoons, the musical, once one of Hollywood's most popular genres, has virtually disappeared. While it may disappoint those of us who like to believe women have lives outside of marriage, the Disney-style formula's standard boy-meets-girl scenario harks back to the earliest, Aristotelian formulations of comedy.

Plus, the Disney juggernaut ices its cartoon cakes with the best in American values. Think of *Pocahontas* and its support for Native American culture; *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* with its moral about the handicapped and the homely. As painfully garbled as the history and politics of Fox's *Anastasia* are — one Romanov relative even complained in the *New York Times* — such cartoon stories expose children to cultural traditions beyond the borders of America.

Thanks to such cartoons, some children may be inspired to read the original *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* by Victor Hugo or investigate what really happened to the Romanovs, in the case of *Anastasia*. Media research shows that films adapted from books tend to stimulate reading of the original. And look at what Oprah's TV book club has done.

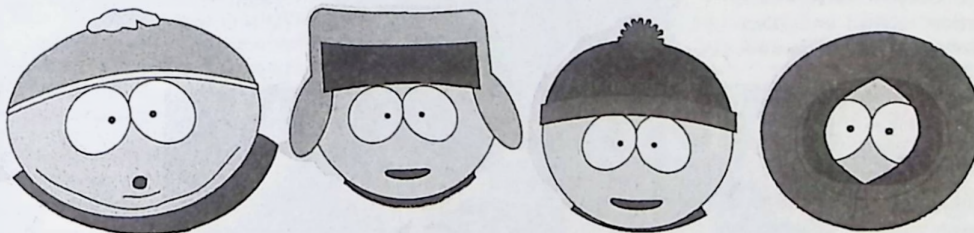
If Disney-style moralizing has become so solemn that critic Michiko Kakutani complains animators should stop their sermons and lighten up, at least parents can rest assured that their precious offspring will not be exposed to the foul-mouthed likes of *South Park*. Horror of horrors, that Comedy Central TV trash is currently a teen cult hit. Then there's Bart Simpson... and *King of the Hill*. Omigosh, is TV destroying us after all? Aren't cartoons in the Disney mold the answer?

Through is, some of the most innovative work in animation appears on TV. There's where you can start to understand what's wrong with Disney. If you tune in Wednesday night at 10 p.m. for the shenanigans of the bratty Iboys from *South Park*, Colorado, you may scratch your head in confusion hunting for purely technical innovation. The draw-

ing and animation look primitive at best, while the likes of *Anastasia* are candy for the eyes.

What's important is that animation like TV's *South Park* makes a strong statement against the glibness of the Disney machine, where quality of execution and storytelling stay trapped in timidity and traditionalism. You may not like the gutter language of *South Park*'s 8-year-olds, but it's meant to shock and catch your attention. It works as a cover for rather earnest, well-meaning explorations of such ethical dilemmas as environmentalism vs. development, racial tensions, religion and commercialism. The only dead spot in the show's moral matrix comes in gender issues: *South Park* is boys' turf.

Cartoons that amount to more than pretty stereotypes and plot clichés need to be irreverent, subversive, anarchic, even offensive. That's how they cut through the wool we like to pull over our eyes. The success of *The Simpsons* and *South Park* has been predicated not on patting ourselves on the back but talking about what's wrong with American life. Sure, the antics of Beavis and Butt-head are bound to offend some, but the reason so



many teenagers laugh their heads off at these slow-witted, sex-obsessed losers is that the satire hits home. Parody, satire, caricature —

the more trenchant the better — build from a belief in and commitment to the human condition. When we hold up the fun-house mirror of animated cartoons or comic strips and don't like what we see — think of *Maus*, for instance, and its heartbreaking depictions of the Holocaust—we're getting a message that things need to change.

The trouble with Disney's lock on cartoon features is that it hides behind a dishonest worldview. Yes, we want to protect our kids — and ourselves — from the ugly side of life. We want our happy endings, but once the truth gets buried, it comes back to destroy us. The story of the Russian revolution cannot be reduced to the adventures of a spunky amnesiac. A voluptuous Pocahontas is probably not who appealed to Capt. John Smith, and she didn't marry him anyway. Quasimodo was not just a sweet-tempered cripple happy to let Desdemona end up with the handsome Phoebus. What's the point of learning about Hercules if the Disney version can't be bothered with the 12 labors that made him the mythical hero he is.

Even more disturbing than the dishonesty of the Disney worldview that controls Hollywood is the way it contributes to the commodification of our cultural life. *Anastasia* the movie leads to *Anastasia* the doll, the food-chain tie-in, the chirrupy soundtrack CD: the pirating of history and ideas through totalized packaging and market domination. What kids — and the rest of us — need more than anything else is tools for independent thought. Provocative ideas. That's what cartoons do at their best. Let Disney-trained animators give us an occasional sugar fix, but don't help them stifle the rest of the cartoon industry. Fight bowdlerization. Support your local animator!

Film & Video

Guilty Pleasures

Interesting Failures In Film Available On Video ©

by Michael Charles Hill

This surreal, and oftentimes anachronistic, pseudo-western, is a religious/mystical allegory, extracted from multi-cultural parables and mythology, layered with heavy-handed symbolism, yet combining the visual and story telling elements of cinema's master artists; Kurosawa, Leone, Peckinpah, and Fellini.

Jodorowsky (*The Holy Mountain*, *Tusk*, and *Santa Sangre*), who also writes comic book scripts for the French artist Moebius, tells the story of El Topo and his spiritual journey to find enlightenment, in two separate, yet equal, parts — not unlike the Bible — the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The first half of the film is of El Topo, as a black leather-clad gunfighter, with long dark hair and a beard, who, while riding a horse through the desert with his seven-year old son, Brontis, comes upon a village laid to waste, its inhabitants slaughtered. And so El Topo seeks their revenge.

Upon his victory, he abandons his son, leaving him with the local Franciscan monks, and continues on his journey with a woman — who just happens to be the mistress of the man responsible for the death of the villagers.

But this woman, Mara, demands that he prove his love for her by killing Four Master Sharpshooters who live in the desert. And, sure enough, one by one, he eliminates each of the four masters. Although, not by the mastery of his gun, but rather by deceit, trickery, and/or the masters' desire to be killed, so that they can continue on their own journey.

However, along the way, El Topo and Mara are shadowed by The Woman In Black, who seduces Mara and together, they kill El Topo, in Christ-like fashion, as he mourns his fate and the folly of his journey. Upon his death, his body is carried off into a cavernous mountain by a band of cripples and freaks.

In the second half of the film, El Topo awakes many years later, deep



EL TOPO

[1971]

written and directed by Alexandro Jodorowsky
starring: Alexandro Jodorowsky, Jacqueline Lus, Mara Lorenzo, Paula Romo, Robert John, Brontis Jodorowsky, and Alfonso Arau



El Topo art by Spain Rodriguez, reprinted from *Taboo 4*.

within the aforementioned mountain cavern, to find his hair/beard bleached and his skin painted white. It seems that he has been revered by the cripples/freaks as a god. But he is the first to admit that he is only a man.

One of the cavern dwellers, referred to in the screenplay only as the Small Woman (actually a dwarf), leads El Topo through the enormous cave and among the deformed populace who stare silently at him, beseeching his help.

The Small Woman delivers El Topo to the community elder and during a beetle eating ceremony he is resurrected and reborn. With his head and face shaved, and wearing the cloth cassock of a monk, El Topo vows to dig a tunnel and lead the cripples/freaks out of the

mountain and into town.

Venturing into town and, posing as simpletons in an effort to earn money, El Topo and the Small Woman perform odd jobs and vaudevillian stunts in this latter day Sodom. And with their earnings, El Topo is able to buy dynamite to begin the excavation of the tunnel.

Meanwhile, a young Franciscan monk has arrived in town and has taken over the ministry of the local church. It is Brontis, El Topo's now-fully grown son. And when El Topo and the Small Woman enter the church in search of a priest to marry them, Brontis, recognizing the man who left him years ago, vows to kill his father.

The Small Woman pleads for mercy, as she tells of El Topo's new life. Brontis, now wearing the exact same outfit his father wore at the beginning of the film, relents and allows El Topo and the Small Woman to finish their work, promising to "dog" them day and night until they are finished.

But the job takes many weeks, months in fact, and Brontis is finally encouraged to help them beg and dig in an effort to fulfill his vow. But when the tunnel is completed, he realizes that he can not kill his "master" and throws down his gun in tears.

Meanwhile, the inhabitants of the cavern, overcome with exuberance, pour out into the daylight and run amok down into town. El Topo tries to stop them, as they are not ready. But they don't listen and knock him out of their way.

In town, the villagers are armed and ready for the onslaught of cripples and freaks, massacring them on sight. El Topo arrives filled with rage and despite the numerous shots he takes, he is able to kill all the townspeople and immolate himself.

The final scene is of Brontis, the Small Woman, and her new born baby, riding out of town on horseback.

Lo, these many years later, *El Topo* is sometimes painfully embarrassing to watch — like looking at old high school graduation photographs of yourself, but it is worth seeing nonetheless. It is an

Continued on page 42

by Bob Flaherty

BOB

By rights, my virginity should have been jettisoned right then and there, in the back-

seat of Wendy Pfister's father's Fairlane, at 11 o'clock at night, in the parking lot behind the MDCrink, with the moon full, the breezes gentle,

Cream on the tape deck and the crickets chirping like mad. She was the first girlfriend I ever had who let me kiss her in places other than her lips and I was hell-bent on getting to as many of them as I could. Various parts of our clothing — a shirt here, a nylon there — were already dangling from rearview mirrors, strewn across headrests, and more were on their way. But, for some reason — and for this I have no rational explanation — it all reminded me of Peter Parker.

"Who's Peter Parker?" she asked, lifting my panting, oxygen-deprived face up to the moonlight so she could fully appreciate my reply.

Incredulously, and in between gasping breaths, I explained that Peter Parker was the secret identity of the Amazing Spider-Man. When not one spark of recognition appeared in her troubled eyes, I told her that Pete was your typical little bookwormish high school student who got accidentally bitten by a radioactive spider, acquiring that insect's proportionate strength and wall-crawling abilities — not to mention an uncanny sixth 'spider sense' that went off like a three-alarm fire any time danger was near — and that he was only the greatest and most inspirational figure in the Marvel Comics universe.

"Why does somebody so great need a secret identity?" she asked, removing my left hand from wherever it had been.

"Well, basically to protect his Aunt May, who he lives with. If everybody knew who he was, her situation would be greatly compromised and all manner of vile scum, from Kraven the Hunter to The Sinister Six, would kidnap her and hold her hostage and God knows what else."

"So why doesn't Peter arrange for Aunt May to be bitten by her own irradiated spider so she can protect herself?"

"At her age?" I cried, "Whattya trying to kill her?"

Somehow I could sense a shifting of momentum. She began re-hooking her bra in the back; the same bra that had taken me the entire first side of *Disraeli Gears* to disengage.

"Ths Stupendous Spider-Man of yours — does he fly?"

"Don't be silly. Spiders don't fly. He invented this super sticky webbing, though, that he squirts out of these devices on his wrists, enabling him to swing from building to building like Tarzan of the Apes."

"Doesn't his cape get in the way?"

"His cape? Are you kidding? Nobody in Marvel wears a cape. That's strictly D.C. all the way, man."

"You mean like in Washington?"

"No. D.C. Comics. You know, Batman, Superman, Robin the Boy Wonder in his little green pointy slippers? They wear enough capes to start a nunnery! Even Krypto the goddam Superdog puts one on. And they've got absolutely no opinions about anything and nothing whatsoever to say."

"And your guys, of course, are eloquence personified." She seemed to be groping in the darkness for her blouse.

"You'd better believe it," I said, in an upright position, "Just think of the problems they face: Daredevil with his incurable blindness; Cyclops unable to remove his protective visor even for a second, for fear of annihilating all the other X-Men; Ben Grimm having to live his life trapped in the hideous features of The Thing! I mean, this is real-life stuff here. Of course they've got something to say!"

"And none of them wear capes?"

"Right. Well, except maybe Thor, but he's a god, so that's another story entirely.

"He's God?"

"No," I said, "He's a god. The god of thunder, actually. Asgard is loaded with gods, Odin, Loki, Balder the Brave, the fair Sif..."

"So this is sort of a religion?"

I could tell that this was not going in the intended direction. I countered: "No, it's not a religion. It's just, well, the clothes all flung about reminded me of Pete...I mean, I dunno, I guess it's just something I'm really into, is all."

"Are there any inhabitants of this Marvel Universe that you're *not* really into?" she said, reaching for her shoes.

I had to think for a minute. "Well, I never cared a whole lot for Henry Pym," I said, "He invented some serum that turns him into Ant Man. For Chissakes, aren't we puny *enough*? Why would anybody want to make himself *smaller*? And his *name*! Do you pronounce it 'Pim' or do you pronounce it 'Pime'? As far as I'm concerned anyone who walks around with an unpronounceable name should go to court and have it changed!"

"I see," said Wendy Pfister, who put on her sweater, lit a filter cigarette and climbed back into the driver's seat.

On the way to my house she told me she remembered reading a lot of Little Lotta when she was a kid. And sometimes Little Dot. And occasionally Casper.

When I was a kid I read Cosmo the Merry Martian. Faithfully. I saw no reason to bring it up.



BOB

Ask Mr. Smarty-Pants?

Q: If the Buddha was supposed to be an ascetic then why is he so often portrayed as fat and happy?

Yes, Buddha was in fact an ascetic and is often portrayed as such in the lands from whence he came, namely, southwest Asia. In fact, even in East Asia there are depictions of the Buddha as a thin contemplative man.

In the Chugu-ji Nunnery near Nara, Japan there is a large wooden statue of the Buddha which shows a thin man with no secondary sexual characteristics, and seated on a lotus.

One Indian depiction of the Buddha that I have seen shows a man so gaunt that his ribs are clearly visible.

The fat cheerful Buddha that one often sees depicted in small trade good statues is most likely the result of the early Chinese belief that important people are prosperous and that prosperous people are plump.

The philosophical and religious position of the Buddha also varies considerably depending on which sect one is dealing with. Tantric Buddhism, for example, is very different in its outlook than Zen Buddhism and therefore also different in some of its depictions of the Buddha.

[A couple of questions sparked by the recent movie *Amistad*:]

Q: Isn't it true that most of the slave trade was carried on by Jews?

No. In fact the earliest slave trade in Africa occurred on the east coast and was conducted by the Arabs.

According to the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* and other early texts, the East African trade in enslaved peoples began long before the "Christian era," and recent researches indicate that by the 19th century large parts of the African coast had been essentially depopulated by Arab kidnappers.

More interesting perhaps is the fact that the East African slave trade continues even to this day. Last year two reporters from the *Baltimore Sun* negotiated to purchase two young boys from slavers in the Sudan. They did not, of course, keep them in thrall.

As to the transatlantic trade in kidnapped Africans, in the early days of European colonization of the New World the trade was carried out almost exclusively by Spanish and Portuguese Catholics.

In later years, as other European powers began to exert their influence in the Western Hemisphere, German, French, Dutch and English slavers entered the trade.

Among the Germans who invested money in the lucrative business was the house of Rothschild, wealthy Jewish bankers who increased their fortunes by doing well in the "blood trade." It is, I believe, largely the influence of this one family that caused the rumors of Jewish hegemony in the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans.

Q: Isn't it true that blacks sold their own people as slaves?

Not exactly. It is true that African chieftains would sell members of neighboring, and usually enemy, tribes to slavers, but on the whole selling people from one's own ethnic group was frowned upon.

Part of the confusion here stems from the fact that Americans, particularly white Americans, have traditionally failed to recognize a difference between African ethnic and national groups, seeing everyone involved in the slave trade in Africa as being equally "black."

However, just as people in Britain draw distinctions between the Welsh, the Scot, and the Yorkshireman, let alone English and French, the Yoruba peoples of Africa, for example, see little relationship between themselves and members of the Igbo or Mandinka tribes.

To anticipate what I suspect will be a question raised by this answer, yes, slavery did exist in Africa (just as it did in Europe and Asia) and yes, blacks did hold other blacks and sometimes whites in thrall. However the slavery code that was formed in the New World was quite distinct from and in most cases far more brutal than its predecessors in the Old World.



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Ask Mr. Smarty-Pants

Weird Valley

by Joseph A. Citro

Pittsburg, New Hampshire, the Granite State's northernmost town, provides the headwaters from which the Connecticut River begins its 407-mile journey to the sea.

At the same time this remote wilderness region provides the source of a modern mystery. For years brilliant flying objects have crisscrossed the skies above New Hampshire's North Country. It's as if Pittsburg and all of Coos County lie against a mystical border to another realm.

The most recent flare-up of aerial oddities began January 22, 1997 as Beverly Higgins drove home around seven o'clock at night. On Route 3, near the Columbia, New Hampshire trailer park, something bright flashed past her vehicle. Whatever it was sped east, moving across the Connecticut River from Vermont. Mrs. Higgins described an airborne oval object with at least six windows. For a time it hovered noiselessly before rocketing off over the mountains.

On January 23 a daylight encounter took place on Route 26. Two employees of the Balsams resort saw a large saucer-shaped something hovering vertically in the sky. Subsequently, dozens of additional sightings poured in from all over Coos County.

Vermont's Northeast Kingdom was equally busy, with reports from St. Johnsbury, Lyndonville, Hardwick, and Danville. All described domed, silver-colored saucers, sometimes with windows. Generally measuring from 30 to 65 feet in diameter, they hover silently or zoom instantaneously out of sight.

While some UFOs were the size of baseballs, others — like the one reported in North Stratford, NH — were as big as houses. An extraordinarily titanic UFO was spotted near Pittsburg; it was the size of an ocean liner and was covered with lights and attached structures.

On August 12, 1997, near McIndoe Falls, Vermont on the Connecticut River, a witness saw a bright white light shaped like a mayonnaise jar lid. Spiked protrusions were visible at the top and sides. The UFO shimmied up and down, left and right — erratic movements which could not have been duplicated by conventional aircraft.

The frequency of reports is astounding. Raymond Fowler, the Mutual UFO Network's director of investigations, said he hasn't seen anything like it. "We've had sightings," he told the *Boston Herald*, "but not sighting after sighting after sighting." In fact, as of this writing, the North Country probably has the highest number of reported UFO sightings anywhere in the nation.

Who better to root out suspected aliens than a trained law enforcement agent? Sandra Black has been helping MUFON investigate and track the voluminous witness testimony. In June she experienced a sighting of her own near her home in Stewartstown, New Hampshire. Earlier that month a Berlin, New Hampshire woman had a somewhat similar sighting in which she spied two lights in the sky. One appeared round and spinning; the other resembled an arrow. The two UFOs came together, merg-

VMAG

ing into one.

Perhaps significantly, New Hampshire's North Country gave birth to the modern UFO abduction phenomenon. It was there, not far from Colebrook, that in 1961 Betty and Barney Hill reported their famous kidnapping by aliens.

Strange as that may have been, recent events challenge

Northern Lights

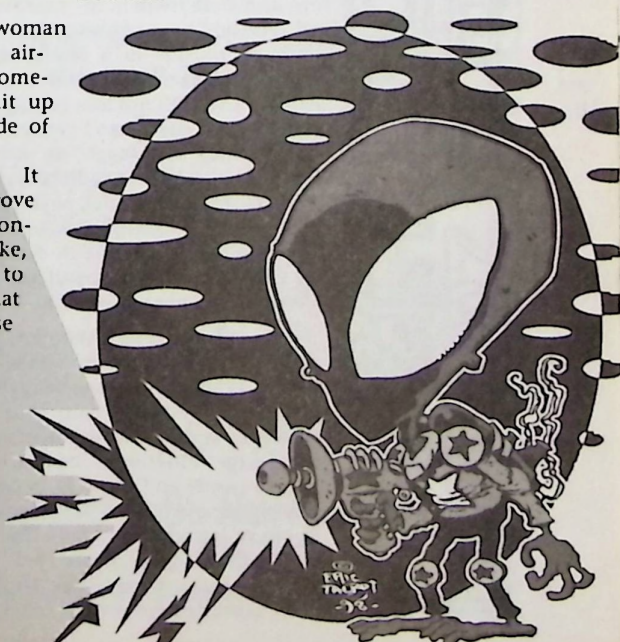
the Hills' story for sheer weirdness. For example, a New Hampshire couple whose home

overlooks First Connecticut Lake near Pittsburg, saw a bright flying object wobbling in the air. Later the woman discovered an inexplicable triangle-shaped mark on her leg, 2.5 inches long on each side.

Another lady reported that a three-foot ball of light floated in her window during the middle of the night. When the glowing sphere stopped, five, four-foot aliens climbed out.

A third woman witnessed an airborne "something" that lit up the whole side of Magalloway Mountain. It landed in a cove on First Connecticut Lake, which led to speculation that an alien base may exist somewhere in the wilds of northern New Hampshire.

In Canaan, Vermont a teenage boy claimed he saw a big



THE NURSE IS IN

by Jessica Faller-Berger, RN

SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

The inextricable link between one's life and one's psyche is amalgamated within an organ susceptible to disease. Intrinsic to one's entire existence is the health of the brain. So, imagine living for one day amidst a floridly psychotic break from reality, as might occur during an exacerbation of the lifelong illness, schizophrenia. Pretend that momentarily, your brain could transform into that of someone suffering from this disease. All at once, the pools of cerebrospinal fluid in the ventricles expand, neurochemicals misfire, prefrontal cortex activity malfunctions, and your hippocampus shrinks. These degenerations bring forth hallucinations and delusions that make you decide to abandon your boring job at the paper company because you are now the President of Bell Atlantic. You need to run for cover because the FBI is trying to kidnap you so they can insert microchips below your jaw to steal your thoughts. You would like to drive away, but behind the wheel of your car is a giant bird with the head of Lord Jeffrey of Amherst. He bellows "I am going to kill you with smallpox, cut your body into little slivers, and store them in my short-wave radio." Ok, you will have to walk home. A glittering emblem outside of a Northampton Main Street shop transfixes your attention. You explain that "It's not that I can't concentrate right its just that I can't concentrate on the major issues. I get fogged up with all the different bits and lose the important things in the picture. I find myself paying attention to all sorts of tiny things instead of getting on with the things I should be doing" (McGhie en Chapman from Robert J van den Bosch, *Communication and Cognition*, 1995).

An enhanced proclivity for detail is coupled with a debilitating inability to perceive entities as totalities — especially faces. Now, a Meter-Maid instructs you to move along. However, your ability to integrate parts into wholes (gestalt) is lost. To process the Meter-Maid's words and respond to her appropriately is impossible, as: "I perceived a statue, a figure of ice which smiled at me. And this smile, showing her white teeth, frightened me. For I saw the individual features of her face, separated from each other; the teeth,

then the nose, then the cheeks, then one eye and the other. Perhaps it was this independence of each part that inspired such fear and prevented my recognizing her even though I knew who she was" (Sedhehaie, 1950).

Every move you make intensifies the experience of fragmentation. Thus, you are compelled to remain completely motionless (catatonia/psychomotor poverty). Standing frozen in time, gaze fixed, you remark: "Everything is in bits. You put the picture up bit by bit into your head. It's like a photograph that's torn in bits and put together again. You have to absorb it again. If you move it's frightening. The picture you had in your head is still there but it's broken up. If I move there's a new picture that I have to put together again" (McGhie en Chapman, 1961).

Due to frontal lobe dysfunction, interactions which were once *automatically* processed now require superhuman concentration (van den Bosch, 1995). Lacking is the streamlined ability to filter out extraneous details, such as specks of dust in a shaft of light. Illustrative of this psychic fatigue is a "Corrosive sensation in the limbs, muscles as if twisted, then laid open; brittle feeling of being made of glass; wincing and cringing at any move or sound... Willpower constantly inhibited in even the simplest gestures, renunciation of simple gestures, overwhelming and CENTRAL fatigue, sort of a dark horse fatigue running for something or other. Body motions run haywire in sort of death exhaustion, mind fatigued at simplest muscular tension like gesture of grasping-unconsciously clinging to something, *holding it together by constant will power*" (Antonin Artaud, *Description of a Physical State*, 1924).

Next, imagine the entire visual world literally decomposing (van den Bosch, 1995). The universe crumbles into a hallucination which combines a sense of the cosmic with delusory content: "The sun seems to be staring. But it stares as if it were staring at the sun. This stare is a cone which stands headfirst in the sun. And the air is all like some clotted music, but a vast profound music, well put together and secret and full of congealed ramification. And all this in a masonry of pillars, in a sort of draftsman's wash by which belly and reality are in contact" (Artaud, 1924).

[You've just read published excerpts by writers with schizophrenia, alongside fabricated events representative of the schizophrenic experience. Alienating motifs characteristic of schizophrenia include delusions of grandeur/persecution, sensation/belief of bodily invasion, grotesque auditory/visual hallucinations, disintegration and fragmentation of perception, difficulty communicating, and immobility.]

PATHOPHYSIOLOGY

The brain of the person with schizophrenia differs radically from that of the non-schizophrenic. One striking structural difference manifests as enlarged ventricles — the cerebrospinal-fluid containing cavities in the brain. There is a concurrent decrease in the size of the hippocampus, that area which transforms sensory experience into memory (Marieb, 1994). Cerebral blood flow studies implicate frontal

lobe hypoactivity as the etiology of symptoms such as mental fatigue (van den Bosch, 1995). NARSAD corroborates this data, reporting decreased activity in the prefrontal cortex, where higher mental processes occur. Neurotransmitters in the brain allow nerve cells to send messages to each other, making thoughts and actions possible. One widely accepted view purports that schizophrenia is caused by excessive production of the neurotransmitter, dopamine. New studies by Heresco-Levy published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* (1996) suggest that "disturbances in glutamate neurotransmission" lead to schizophrenia. Glutamate is the salt of glutamic acid, the only amino acid metabolized in the brain. The co-agonist, glycine works with glutamate at its receptor sites (Heresco-Levy, 1996). Underscoring the veracity of Heresco-Levy's theory, treatment-resistant schizophrenic patients with low serum glycine levels at baseline, significantly improved after six weeks of exogenous glycine therapy. Researchers caution that more data is still needed to substantiate this pilot study.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Schizophrenia is often mistaken for the extremely rare Multiple Personality Disorder. Actually, schizophrenia is one of the most common mental illnesses, affecting one in every hundred people worldwide. In the United States, an estimated 2.5 million citizens are living with this disease. Onset of the disease usually occurs between the ages of 15 to 25. Symptoms of schizophrenia are often categorized as either positive or negative. The terminology does not infer moral imperatives, but rather implies opposing ends on a continuum of behavior. 'Positive' symptoms embellish, whereas 'negative' symptoms detract.

Positive symptoms include paranoia, hallucinations, delusions, bizarre deportment, and disordered thinking. The person may make up words, use clanging associations, or talk in rhymes. Delusions refer to fixed beliefs based upon fiction. For instance, the patient may believe that his pancreas produces Ancient Egyptian papyrus. Auditory hallucinations voice pejorative comments like; "You are a repulsive whore;" or issue dangerous commands, such as; "Tie a bowling ball around your neck." Researchers believe that excessive subcortical dopamine causes these positive symptoms (Keltner, Schweke, Bostrom, 1995).

Negative symptoms refer to a lack of normal emotion — the patient may appear expressionless, avoid eye contact, or even become catatonic. Avolition, anhedonia, and attention deficit comprise a triad of negative symptoms. Avolition suggests a total lack of energy. Anhedonia denotes an inability to feel pleasure or interest in activities which used to provide enjoyment. Attention deficit means difficulty concentrating. Cognition itself is fueled by finite energy. Compensatory mechanisms of schizophrenia induce the brain to consciously process details that are normally rendered subconsciously. This continuous intentional effort ransacks the brain of its energy supply, resulting in the negative symptoms (van den Bosch, 1995).

SUICIDE AND SCHIZOPHRENIA

"... By suicide, I shall for the first time give things the shape of my will... Certainly it is abject to be created and to live and feel yourself in the darkest corners of your mind, down to the most unthought of ramifications of your irreducibly predetermined being. After all, we are only trees and it is probably written in some crook or other of my family tree that I shall kill myself on a given day" (Antonin Artaud, 1956).

VMA

Schizophrenia does indeed have a genetic component: if both parents have schizophrenia, there is a 40% chance that their child will inherit the disease (NARSAD, 1996). Likewise, according to Dr. Kenneth Rothman at Epidemiology Resources, the rate of suicide in schizophrenics may be 50 times higher than that of the general population. Suicide is the number one cause of death for young people with schizophrenia. Artaud's foreboding of a predestined suicide foretold later statistical and genetic data which would substantiate his existential dread. He proclaims an absence of free will in this life, which can be understood from a neurological perspective as losing agency of his consciousness to the pathology of his disease. The most dangerous time for patients with schizophrenia is not when they are hallucinating, but rather, when they are thinking clearly. When lucid, patients may gain cataclysmic insight into their illness. Depressed from beholding the panorama of a devastated mental landscape, 2 out of every 10 people with schizophrenia will attempt suicide, and about half succeed (NARSAD, 1996).

Fortunately, new medications are successfully controlling the symptoms of schizophrenia. *The American Journal of Psychiatry* (1995) reports an 86.4% reduction in suicide attempts by patients using the drug Clozaril. These patients must have their blood tested regularly for

Continued on page 42

The Nurse Is In

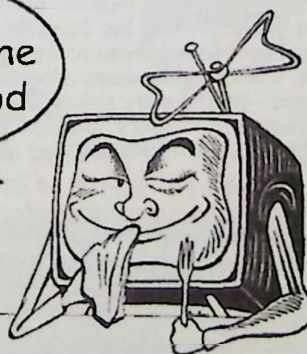
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Holyoke from page 5

illustration section, captioned "Children are first shocked and then desensitized by all this brutality"). In the spring of 1954, Tennessee Democratic Senator Estes Kefauver organized a Senate Subcommittee investigation of the entire comics industry.

By the autumn of that same year, the industry's self-regulatory Comics Code Authority was created, spearheaded by Archie Comics publisher Richard Goldwater. The Code effectively countered the public outcry against crime and horror comics, while coincidentally reducing the competition.

The combination punch of the Kefauver hearings and the formation of the Comics Code Authority hammered a stake into the horror comics' heart with resounding finality for almost a decade. By 1957, Marvel had reduced its line by two-thirds, and many smaller publishers had gone out of business. Comics scholar M. Thomas Inge reports that "before the Code took effect, more than 1,000,000,000 issues of comic books were being sold" (quoted from *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*, 22nd Edition, 1992, page A-73). In the wake of the Code and nationwide negative press accompanying the Senate Subcommittee hearings, the industry sold a fraction of that annual number.

The industry has never recovered.

For a time, comics were still printed in Holyoke. As the industry imploded, so did the demand for multiple printing outlets. By 1960, World Color Press of Sparta, Illinois had become the primary printer for almost all American four-color comics, dominating the field until the mid-1980's. Climbing paper costs and the demand for higher printing standards sent business north to Canada, where printers like Ronald's and Quebecor established accounts with Marvel, DC Comics, and many alternative publishers. By the early 1990's, decades after Holyoke's comics presses were stilled, World Color's presses were quiet, too.

But as any horror comics reader can tell you, death is never the end.

In some Grandfather's barn or Grandmother's attic or basement, the Holyoke horrors still linger. Moldering in forgotten boxes, their covers brittle with age, they cradle yellowing pages kissed with blood-tinged ink. The Holyoke horrors may be waiting for you...

HELP WANTED! This is the first

VMag

of what we hope will be a series of VMag articles on comic book and magazine publishing in the Pioneer Valley. This initial installment was based upon available research and information gleaned from comics and books in the author's own collection. We welcome any and all corrections, revisions, personal interviews or reminiscences, or further information from readers who have info or insights to offer. Please contact the author care of VMag.

Weird Valley from page 39

hairy monster nine feet tall. Not to be outdone, a New Hampshireite reported seeing a cricket the size of a man.

One of the more credible "encounters" took place in Colebrook. A well-respected 73-year old woman claims that twelve aliens visited her home. They sat around her kitchen table, taking notes and conferring in whispers. The weird visitors kept her up well past her bedtime, completely insensitive to her fatigue and polite hints that they should leave.

The woman, an employee of a local nursing home, found the event greatly disturbing. According to coworkers, she hasn't been quite herself since.

So what's going on? Why all the weirdness? If the airborne lights are not-of-this-earth, what are they?

Some predict continued celestial events in 1998 and '99 portend a millennial miracle. Others venture no such lofty conclusion but have made UFO spotting a popular evening activity in the North Country.

Still others maintain the mysterious aerial lights have been around for centuries; in effect, for them, it's business as usual. And why not? In this isolated region that once declared its independence from the United States, alien neighbors — like the long winters, poor roads, and isolation — are just something else to be tolerated.

Guilty Pleasures from page 38

icon of film and should be required viewing by every student of film and a necessary frame of reference.

And now, twenty-seven years later, Alfonso Arau, the actor, turned director (*Like Water For Chocolate*, *A Walk In the Clouds*, and the upcoming *Pancho Villa*), will executive produce the sequel, as Jodorowsky prepares to direct the screenplay for his long-awaited *The Sons of El Topo*.

Kitchen from page 19

of expression but it reimbursed them on a fairer basis. That's not to say they made more money but they got a larger share of the pie. A mainstream comic that sold 200,000 copies in those days maybe only paid the artist three times more than an underground comic that only sold 10,000 copies. We didn't kill mainstream comics but we changed the industry forever in a lot of ways. Today the mainstream publishers return all the original artwork. They show that minimal respect. They will sometimes pay a royalty on certain books but not as much as we pay. I don't want to over-simplify, but they have even begun doing books that attempt to be more artistic and literary. The larger issue is not "underground versus mainstream" but whether the medium itself is growing and having a broader appeal beyond a small number of fans. And the jury is still out on that. In terms of actual sales the comics industry peaked in 1994 and it has been in decline since then...

[Continued next issue...]

Nurse from page 41

the potentially fatal side effect of agranulocytosis — a serious reduction in the number of white blood cells. Consistently adhering to the prescribed drug regimen is the key to preventing relapse. NARSAD (1996) relays that while there is still no cure for schizophrenia, proper treatment can usually control symptoms so that patients can lead productive and fulfilling lives.

If you would like more information pertaining to Schizophrenia, call NARSAD, the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression, at 1-800-829-8280.

Run-Ons

VMail

Dear Sir or Ms,

Just read VMag 3, my first look at VMag. Your cover was very seductive; it made me curious.

I enjoyed some of the articles, especially Jessica Faller-Berger's on Alcoholism. It's apparent she knows her subject and does an excellent job of communicating her knowledge.

- Tony Pappas, Springfield

To Whom It May Concern,

I would like to thank you for putting out a great mag. I pick it up every time it comes out.

I was wondering if you would be interested in doing a section about teenagers and riding bikes and skateboards? It's a big thing here in Easthampton. They wanted us off the streets, so they built a skate/bike park. But now they won't allow bikes to go in there. Me and a lot of my friends think you should do a story on this.

By the way, your mag rules.

- Billy Swenor, Easthampton

Thanks, Billy. We'll try to get someone to cover the story over the next month or so.

Hey -

Thanks for a refreshing local magazine. Way to go with the 'F' word!

- Travis C. Roy

Dear VMag (Murphy),

I read your sex/Valentine's issue. You're right — we don't need more exclusively male-hetero viewpoints. Boo-hiss!!!

- E. Kroon

'F' you, Kroon. (=Joke.) Hey, I never said we don't need more male-hetero magazines; I said I was concerned that issue 4 was turning out too male-hetero, given the variations of lifestyles found in the Valley that we could have covered (variations that we'll explore in future sex-themed issues) and that I, suffering PCitis, was worrying about it too much.

Which reminds me: Nine businesses that used to carry VMag decided to stop doing so, the majority of whom were reacting to customer complaints over last issue's content. Squeaky wheel syndrome, y'know? Which is why I reiterate: Don't like it, don't read it. And if you like it, please spread the word.



Special thanks: To Steve Bissette for kindly digging through his vast archives for images used throughout this issue; likewise to Renrut re the Scat pieces; to Jim Z and Denis K for the eleventh-hour interview (the long conclusion of which will run next issue); to Candace for helping out with ad creations; and to Daniel for the image at left (for more info on Daniel's YUM! coloring book, stickers, t-shirts, etc., e-mail him at attaboyeep@aol.com).

VMAG

SPIT

I spit into the wishing well,
my saliva dropped like a star from hell,
coating copper pennies with sloppy kisses,
putting rude curses on people's wishes,
excess foam floated on my reflecting face,
invading the water with a bubbling lace,
ripples broke the surface and splashed against stone,
the water reacted in an echoing tone,
I licked my lips with an evil smile,
I had done my deed in a devilish style,
my little gift clashed with people's hopes,
I always figured that wishes were for dopes.

- Maia Bissette

FROM DANIEL SEIFERT'S YUM!
COLORING BOOK:



End Page

SAVE THE GASOLINE FOR THE
FLAMES THAT MATTER.

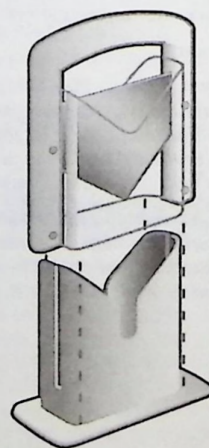
(This issue dedicated to Michael Zulli and Dave Sim)

Next issue: THE FUTURE
(of the Valley and beyond)

Available around March 18 wherever free
publications are found

"I just need a little SPACE!"

We've all been there: You get a great idea, need to remember a phone number, have to sketch something, draw a map, write down a lyric... and there's no paper anywhere. The next time this happens, help will be as close as a copy of VMag. Through issue 13, Larien Products (a great little Northampton company) will sponsor this "creativity page." Now, when you get hit with a brainstorm or just need to put something down on paper, grab the nearest writing implement and a copy of VMag and GO WILD!



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